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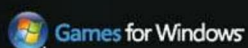
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Bethesda



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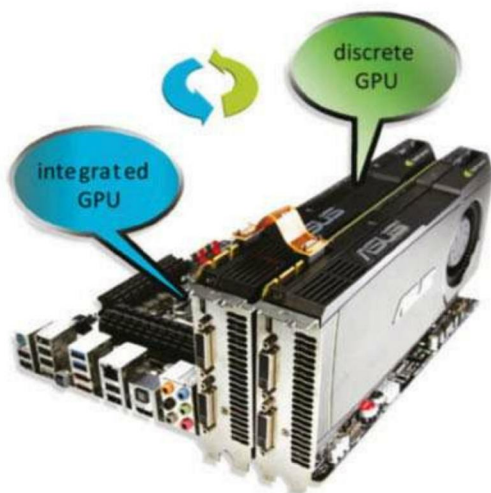


GENE SPLICING TO BUILD THE BEST

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The new Intel® Z68 Chipset has dropped, and with it has come the all new ROG Maximus IV GENE-Z (M4G-Z). Don't be fooled by the diminutive µATX design, the M4G-Z is packed with goodies to give gamers access to the latest tech.

The design of the M4G-Z is meant to be portable, but it still has enough space to sport 2 PCI-E 16x slots so you can run graphics cards in either SLI or CrossFireX mode. And with the addition of Lucid® Virtu™, you can also take advantage of Intel's integrated GPU on their 2nd generation Core™ i7 CPUs for improved 3 times faster video transcoding. What does that mean? It means you get great gaming graphics from your discrete card *AND* fantastic multimedia enjoyment from the integrated GPU. The handy-dandy GPU TweakIt feature that's also on board allows you to adjust the system's GPU settings from an external notebook in real-time, should you want to tweak it for that extra bump in performance.

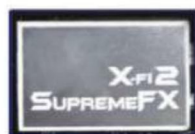


↑ Universal graphics switching between integrated and discrete GPUs in CrossFireX or SLI mode



Also packed into the mini frame is an Intel® Ethernet port that's optimised with ROG exclusive GameFirst software to intelligently prioritise game traffic. So you can download music, movies or whatever you want while still tearing a new one in the competition. The sound is also superb, thanks to a SupremeFX X-Fi 2 audio chip, delivering fantastic surround sound to your ears.

The M4G-Z is also loaded with the new UEFI BIOS, which provides a mouse-enabled graphical BIOS menu for easy adjustment of system settings. An added bonus is the ASUS feature CPU Level-up, which easily upgrades the CPU at no additional cost with a simple click for even faster performance.



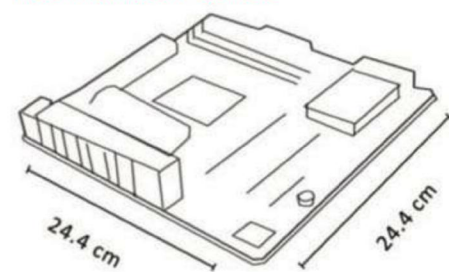
A built-in SupremeFX X-Fi 2 audio chip offers fantastic surround sound.



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#233 DECEMBER 2011

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Sins of the father

When I joined this magazine, I was fresh-faced, happy and brimming with the energy of youth. Today, I stand before you as a greying, sleepy and proud new father. Times change.

When the first *PlanetSide* was released, online gaming was similarly infantile. Most gamers only had 56K modems, and most multiplayer games supported only a handful of players. It was a world that wasn't ready for the MMOFPS. But again, times change. Now we have broadband, and we have PCs more than capable of placing us on battlefields chaotic with dropships, tanks and hundreds of soldiers. *PlanetSide 2* sounds like it's making good on all the promises made by its father, and you can find out just how well the game has grown up on page 46. Just as there are changes at home and online, there are changes at PC Gamer.

When Craig joined, he was the Shaggy Scot. As he leaves us this month, he's a... short-haired Scot. We'll miss him, but his face will be in these pages again.

Change can be frightening, but the one thing I promise won't waver is our commitment to bringing you the very best games writing in the world, with great free gifts to go with it. You can find this month's collection, including free money for Sony MMOs, on page 66. Enjoy the Issue.



Tim Edwards

TIM EDWARDS

EDITOR

tim.edwards@futurenet.com

@hanknova

Talk to PC Gamer

Have your say!
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www.pcgamer.com/forum

BRINGING YOU THE SCOOPS THIS MONTH...



Tom Francis

@pentadact

Celebrated his 30th by drinking Pina Colodas and talking to Ken Levine. The slurred results are on p56.



Graham Smith

@gonnas

Moved into a mansion. Fired pretend rifles from the windows after playing *Red Orchestra 2*.



Craig Pearson

@bucksexington

Left PC Gamer after eight years of loyal service. Didn't cry, but then, he is a hairy, Scottish robot thing.



Rich McCormick

@richmcc

Remained his usual boyishly happy self, despite the disaster and cynicism that await him.

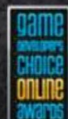
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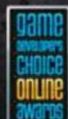
Best
Online Game



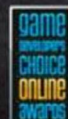
Best
PC Game



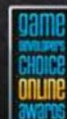
Best
New Game



Best
Visual Arts



Best
Game Design



Audience
Award



Free to Play



Best
Multiplayer



Best
Strategy



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"It does big and it does beautiful"

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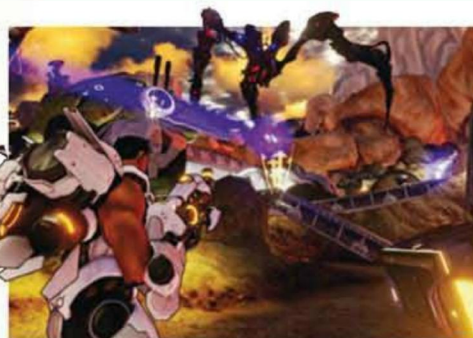
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When he was 17 years old, Matt Lees joined MMO *Runescape* and realised he was one of the older players on the server. So what did he do? He set the younger players to work for him.



68 FIREFALL INTERVIEW

StarCraft, *Diablo II*, *Warcraft III*, *World of Warcraft*... Mark Kern has worked on some of the PC's biggest games. Now he talks to PC Gamer about the exciting new MMOFPS: *Firefall*.

MONITOR

THE **PC GAMER** VIEW OF THE WORLD

Windows 8's design is influenced by Microsoft's phone OS.

Playing with Windows 8

THE BIG STORY What does Microsoft's new operating system mean for PC gamers?

Windows 8 won't be on general release until late 2012. But that hasn't stopped Microsoft releasing a preview build to enable coders to make programs for their new baby. We've had a play with this version, and are slightly closer to answering our main question: what does Windows 8 mean for PC gamers?

The new OS has taken its inspiration from Microsoft's Windows Phones, focusing on touch-screen PCs. Press the Start button and you're greeted with a mosaic of programs: if you've got a touch-

screen monitor or laptop, you can flip between these with a slide of a finger. Windows 8 feels a little clunky for those of us still using a mouse, though.

The preview comes with games designed for touch-screen control, but they're closer to first-wave iPhone than PC gamer fare. Microsoft have backed so far away from PC gaming that we're not expecting Windows 8 to revolutionise it. Rather than wooing us, Microsoft are hoping to lure Xbox 360 players, and they showed Windows 8's potential Xbox Live integration at the BUILD Conference in September. Larry Hyrb, Xbox's Major

Nelson evangelist, suggested Xbox Live would be a service available across PC and console: "It will be easy for developers to create games for Windows 8 that take advantage of the power of Xbox Live."

Previous attempts to do something similar have ended with the fly-blown carcass that is Games for Windows Live. But if Microsoft are pushing their weight behind gaming integration in Windows 8, we might see a system as robust as Xbox Live. Sadly, if Microsoft follow their 360 roadmap, it's likely we'll have to pay for the pleasure. For now, the touch-screen and cross-platform direction won't be of huge interest to core PC gamers – be happy, then, that it promises to be even more lightweight and unobtrusive when running your games than Windows 7. ■

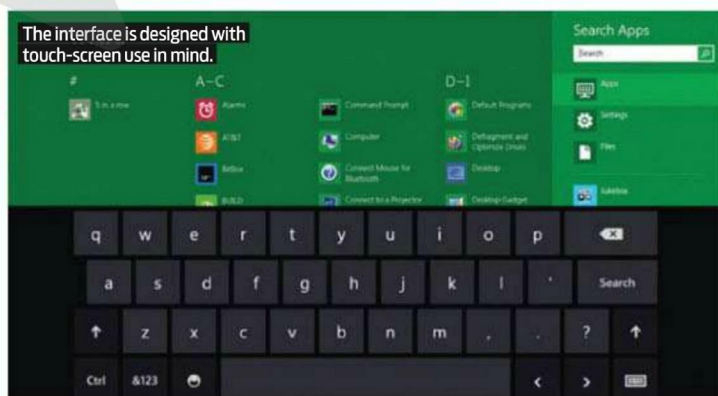
Rich McCormick



Xbox Live will be built into Windows 8.



The interface is designed with touch-screen use in mind.



VACUUM PACKED

CAPITAL SPACE SIM X REBIRTH DETAILS ARE RELEASED

» Egosoft, custodians of the X space sim series, have uncovered a whole space-raft of information about their latest title, *X Rebirth*. The biggest addition – in every sense – is capital ships, metal monsters so large players can land on them, get out, and walk about. You'll also have an NPC crew that will react depending on your behaviour, and the chance to tweak and meddle with your



spaceship down to its superstructure, adding shield generators, gun turrets, and mega-engines to ship modules. **RM**

FULLY OPERATIONAL

SITH HAPPENS THE OLD REPUBLIC RELEASE DATE RUINS CHRISTMAS

» Only a Sith deals in absolutes, so we can assume it was BioWare's evil division that confirmed the release date of *The Old Republic*. In a truly diabolical move, we can expect the giant MMO three days before Christmas, on December 22. Just in time to turn all festive familial get-togethers into slanging matches as your significant others scream for you to get off the PC and come and enjoy the bloody turkey they slaved over while you were grinding womprat. [Unless you're not Christian – Monoculture Ed] **RM**



HEALTH BAR

SORTING GOOD NEWS FROM BAD

Winners

PC Gamer Digital

A Steam-distributed web magazine made by PC Gamer US. Find the first episode at bit.ly/pcgdigi.



The Witcher 2

CD Projekt RED doesn't let up on *Witcher 2*. The 2.0 update is free and comes with a gladiatorial mode.



City of Heroes

Players can now level to 50 without paying a subscription fee.

Duke Nukem Reloaded

Thanks to wranglings between developers Interceptor and *Duke* owners Gearbox, this Unreal remake of *Duke Nukem 3D* has been nuked.



Bethesda

Are taking *Minecraft*-makers Mojang to court over the name of their upcoming card game, *Scrolls*.



Modern Warfare 3

The shooter will give experience boosts to people who buy Mountain Dew and Doritos.

Faildogs



The Rumpus in action: wilder than a weasel in a sock.



Button bashing reaches a whole new level...



The most fun you can have with a hacked Move controller.

Public servers

Inside London's indie-game pub night

Part arcade, part club night and part gladiatorial jousting arena." That's how Marie Foulston describes the project she's co-founded: the Wild Rumpus – a celebration of raucous, manic, multiplayer indie games that are better suited to a big ol' party than to sitting on your sofa.

The first Wild Rumpus took place on September 15 at 93 Feet East on London's Brick Lane. Walking inside was an assault on the senses. There were ten people crowded around an arcade machine called 'The Beast', which was running Vlambeer's manic two-player platformer *Super Crate Box*, where you're tasked with using miniguns, flamethrowers and swords to defeat hordes of monsters.

A few metres away, four people were taking six paces away from a laptop, making animal noises, and then rushing back to be the first to hammer a button 11 times in Copenhagen Game Collective's *BUTTON*, or *Brutally Unfair Tactics Totally Okay Now*. On a projector screen in the background, God and Darwin were constructing cars out of *Tetris* blocks and hurling bombs at each other in Grapefrukt & KlooniGames' *Jesus vs Dinosaurs*, while vast abstract geometric spaceships were being torn apart in Mikengreg's collaborative shooter *4fourths*.

The real treat, however, was in the beer garden out back. A ring of spectators had formed, yelling encouragement, insults and advice to a small group of players while creepy carnival music sped up and

"Pushing through the throng into the centre, it was clear that something peculiar was going on"

slowed down in the background. Pushing through the throng into the centre, it was clear that something peculiar was going on. People holding glowing orbs alternated between lunging wildly at each other and slowing down to do what looked like a bizarre version of tai chi.

This was *Johann Sebastian Joust*, also from the Copenhagen Game Collective. Each player holds a hacked PS Move

controller (it also works with smartphones) and tries to keep it as still as possible while simultaneously attempting to knock other players' controllers. If your controller accelerates rapidly, it trips and you're out.

If you missed out, don't panic – there are more Wild Rumpuses to come. "We'll be back in London again soon and are busy planning The Wild Rumpus 2 (www.thewildrumpus.co.uk) for January 2012," says Foulston. "We hope that through the Wild Rumpus we'll be able to open these games up to a new audience of non-gamers to show off how truly creative and eclectic the work coming out of the indie development scene is." ■

Duncan Geere



Bringing games to non-gamers, and funky cardigans to the masses.



The PCG server in all its glory.

Minecraft art

Turn your saved game into a 3D model

Amazing things have been built in our *Minecraft* server. The centre spawn has Nyan Cat trailing rainbows, a coliseum, a pyramid, and Rio's Jesus being attacked by the Enterprise. We wanted to screenshot it before it got so big we had to turn it off (see page 77).

You need a special program to make images of *Minecraft*'s world. MCobj manages it spectacularly. It's a neat little command-line app that exports *Minecraft* worlds as 3D models for use in rendering applications, such as the freely available Blender.

Doing it this way, rather than using a program that spits out an isometric image (such as the still-brilliant MCMap: bit.ly/oaEnYs) gives you a lot more control over what you see. You can change the angle and move the focus, while the rendering power of Blender

gives the shaky graphics of *Minecraft* a crisp, plastic, toy-like look. It feels like you could reach out and pluck the pirate ship from the water.

The process is a bit complicated, but the trouble is worth it to see your creations in Blender-vision. You'll need to feel comfortable working in Windows console mode (type CMD in the search bar) in order to output a Blender-compatible file. The tutorial here at bit.ly/nbK64Z is the clearest explanation of the steps needed.

You'll need to own *Minecraft* (www.minecraft.net), and have copies of MCobj (bit.ly/o5iWbs) and Blender (www.blender.org). Place MCobj into a folder in your C drive to make finding it easier.

With a little time, patience, and some Googling, you'll elevate your *Minecraft* build to something gorgeous. ■

Craig Pearson

ITV DOCUMENTARY MISTAKES ARMA 2 FOR REAL FOOTAGE

NEWSBEAT HUMAN ERROR TO BLAME FOR LOLOLOLOLOL

ITV documentary 'Exposure: Gaddafi and the IRA' explored the links between the former Libyan leader and the IRA using dramatic 1988 footage of the latter shooting down a British helicopter. "No one died in this attack," said the voiceover. Which seems reasonable, given that the footage was actually a fan-made video clip taken from military simulator *Arma 2*. ITV apologised for the blunder, saying it was "an unfortunate case of human error." **GS**

GLITCH IS GO

LAUNCH INDIE MMO FROM FLICKR FOUNDER COMES OUT OF BETA

The number of free-to-play MMOs is rapidly growing, but very few of them take place inside the minds of 11 giants. *Glitch*, in which players help shape the future of the world, is side-scrolling, runs in your browser, and is now playable by all.

Created by Flickr co-founder Stewart Butterfield, the game encourages players to work together to design its persistent world via Street Projects. In these, people craft items, with rewards handed out for giving away your hard-earned items to fellow players, or for 'donating' them to the imaginative giants by throwing your possessions down a hole. You can play it now at glitch.com. **GS**



SAY WHAT?

THE MONTH IN TONGUES

"With some of our early experiments in putting a direct control scheme into the game via a 360-like analogue controller, I've been thinking, 'Oh this feels even better.'"

Jay Wilson, *Diablo III* lead designer, enraging clickers

"If we had the largest budget in the world I'd love to make something like *Oblivion* set in the Adventure Time universe. It might be fun to make it have *Monster Hunter*-style gameplay with *Katamari* graphics."

Pendleton Ward, on how he'd make an Adventure Time game

"The underperformance I think was just a release timing issue." James Cameron, on why the rubbish *Avatar* game didn't sell

FACE OFF

We should introduce kids to games at a young age

YES Games can help children during their early physical and mental development.

NO A child's mind is a fragile, beautiful thing. It'll be broken by early exposure to games.



Tim Edwards is about to be a daddy. He's terrified that if his child discovers computer games, he'll disappear forever into a vortex of experience points and *Minecraft* builds.



Graham Smith has no children, but he is a man-child. He learnt to write his name on an Amstrad CPC 464 when he was three years old.

TE: By the time the readers get this issue, I'll have spawned a mini-Tim. He'll be dashing, handsome, hopefully have the right number of limbs, and shamelessly poo into paper pants like an incontinent wildebeest. But I'm worried that the entertainment I've made a career out of playing, reviewing and writing about could impede the development of his tiny mind. So I'm thinking of preventing him from playing computer games until he's quite old. Am I mad?

GS: You are mad. Maybe you wouldn't be if your dad had been in the waiting room with a Magnavox Odyssey, ready to thrust it in to your barely formed baby-arms. Computer games don't impede a child's development, they aid it. Like toys, the right games can help teach children fine motor control, creativity, problem solving, how to play with other kids and more. The second that black tar stuff stops spewing from your baby's rear, start teaching him about WASD.

TE: But what if he likes games a little bit too much? Videogames are catnip for toddlers: have you seen what happens when you introduce them to *World of Warcraft* or *Pokemon*? They start drooling, their heads loll back, they seem to enter into a trance. Aren't you meant to spend your time with a small child teaching them about rare seabirds and building Tracy Island out of milk bottles? How do you find time to do that when he's got a level 90 rogue and is raiding Pandaren Prime?

GS: If he likes games too much, pull him away. It is enormously important that the little blighter also goes outside and develops other interests. That's why nature made him so much smaller than you. You can pretty much just make him do stuff, like smacking his tiny baby hand against his own chubby baby face while asking, "Why are you hitting yourself? Why are you hitting yourself?" But there's no reason why games can't be a part of a balanced, healthy upbringing. More importantly, there's no reason you can't play *World of Warcraft* with him. Father-son bonding! You can make him be your healer.

TE: What if he's better than me? Or worse. God, can you imagine? Me raging at my son because he's rolled a shaman and Blizzard nerfed healing wave?

My worries are partly selfish. Right now, he's the one who'll need to be fed with a spoon, and his faced cleaned of dribble. But in 40 years time, there's a good chance I'll need someone to do the same for me. He's my carer-in-waiting. If I don't train him properly, teach him how to commission nursing home services and figure out how to cash-in my mortgage, I'm doomed. I'll be left to rot. Can gamers grow into respectful, responsible adults? Looking around our office, at the man-babies raised by John Carmack and Warren Spector: no. No they can't.

GS: The trick is to select games wisely. Do you want to expose your child to *Galactic Civilisations 2*, where a successful ruler will sacrifice millions to solve overpopulation? Probably not, but *Theme Hospital* might instil them with compassion. *Black & White* might teach them how to coddle their dad like he's an enormous, vulnerable cow. *Supreme Commander* will teach him how to fight off the robot invaders destroying your retirement home *and* how to manage your money. With the right games, your son will be the world's most efficient dad manager.

TE: I do remember that *Galactic Civilisations* allows you to nuke entire planets. That if you cut costs in *Theme Hospital*, you can build a gulag-esque horror-show of exploding heads and vile plagues. That *Black & White* teaches you to torture villagers, and chuck cow shit across the planet. And I've seen the hermetically sealed, tightly ordered, sinister bastions of robotic supremacy you and Tom create every lunchtime when playing *SupCom 2*. There's always a dark side, Graham. Always a dark side.

The debate is over

But who's getting reported to social services? Discuss on www.pcgamer.com/forum

GS: You're right, games *are* a wonderful way to introduce children to the kinds of complex moral and ethical problems they'll encounter in the real world. That means you shouldn't let them play unattended, when they might develop their love of the way blood spritzes from the backs of murdered men without you there to contextualise it. You need to stand over their shoulder, saying: "Son, in real life, this would be wrong. But in the game, that was a wicked headshot. High five!"

TE: I'm definitely not letting my son play videogames. Until he has fine motor control.

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1

Ten things we'd like to see in Thief 4

There's a *Thief* sequel coming soon from Eidos Montreal, but we're scared of how it might turn out. Here's what we think a modern *Thief* game should do.

Thief is one of the great PC game series; a dark, steampunk burglary sim featuring a gravelly voiced, cloaked and sticky fingered Garrett pinching jewellery, robbing banks, and running into the bizarre religious and mechanical cults that are warring for control of an unnamed city.

Thief 4 is coming soon; it's the next project from Eidos Montreal, the studio behind the spectacular reboot of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*. They're a talented bunch, but just in case they need a bit of inspiration, here's what we'd love to see from a next-generation *Thief* game.

1 Retire Garrett

Thief's world is an amazing setting; a place where cults of builders, pagans and secret societies



are in a state of cold war. It's rich and full of allegory, but exceptionally complicated. Like *Deus Ex*, a new *Thief* should be set some time before or after the original games and shouldn't star Garrett. His story is done; at the end of *Thief 3*, he's elevated to being the 'One True Keeper'. Starting again with a fresh pair of eyes would enable new characters to discover the strange and violent world of The City without bogging the story down with 'previously on...' exposition.

Probability: 2/1

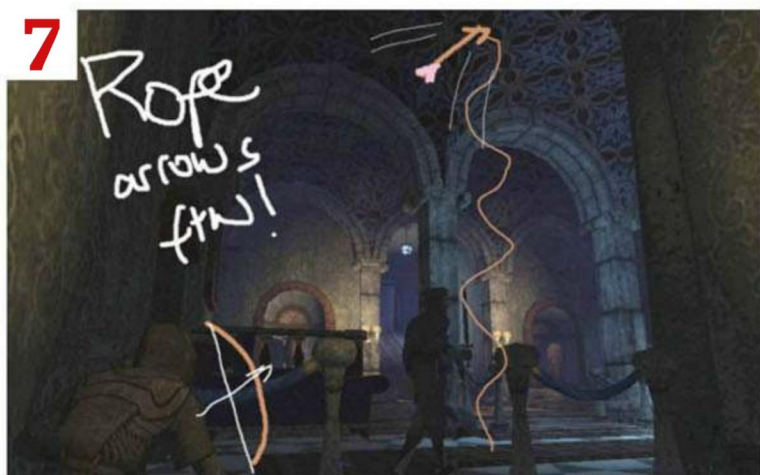
2 But keep the factions and setting

At the heart of *Thief* was the lethal bickering between the Machinists and Hammerites (who both worship industrial power), the Pagans (deeply disturbed hippies) and the Keepers

(rarely trustworthy stewards of The City). Their conflicts, allegiances and betrayals powered the story. They might be complicated, weird and unusual, but they're essential to making a *Thief* game feel like *Thief*. Probability: 1.5/1

3 Treat the supernatural with a light touch

By the end of the third *Thief* game, fans of the series were readily acquainted with the undead – ghosts, telepathic ninjas, ape-beasts and fire-elementals – a whole zombie zoo's worth of terrifying creations. *Thief* has always been an exceptionally frightening series, but the games were at their very best when the horror was presented as abnormal, grotesque and downright unusual. Eidos should provide us with



suspicions of the fantastic while deploying the shocks sparingly.
Probability: 5/1

4 The City

The third *Thief* game (*Thief: Deadly Shadows*) often gets short shrift from diehard fans. It was hindered with loading screens and less ambitious levels, but it did let us wander The City, poke around Garrett's apartment and snoop about in the drawers of dignitaries and drop-outs. Eidos Montreal are good at city-hubs: you have only to spend a bit of time in *DX: HR's* Detroit to see what's possible when developers commit to open(ish) world adventure, sub-quests and self-directed exploration. More of that, please.
Probability: 2/1

5 RPG-lite

Thief: Deadly Shadows toyed with very light-touch RPG elements; you could spend the loot you nicked on new toys, such as flashbombs or special arrows. If you're going to open up the city for players to explore, they'll need to be rewarded; so why not expand this by giving them more toys to spend money on.

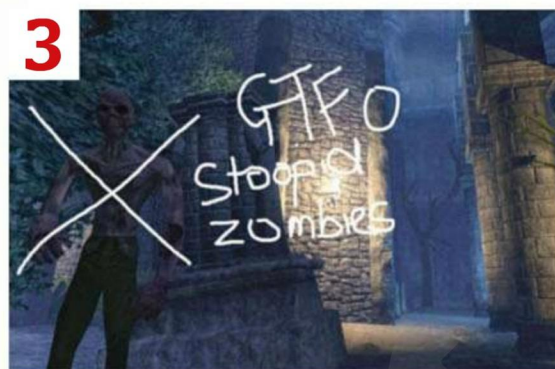
We don't want to see a full XP and level-up system added to the game, just workshops full of steampunk gadgets for us to put to use during our nightly burglaries.
Probability: 5/1

6 Shades of grey

Success in *Thief* meant staying hidden, creeping by in the darkest shadows and moving silently past guards. Confrontation usually meant death. The lighting engine in *Thief 4* will make or break the game. We want to see gorgeous shadows cast by guards carrying torches, flickering log fires, and characters illuminated only by the pale moonlight. And we want that lighting engine to look great on bog-standard PCs and consoles, but utterly stunning on high-end rigs. *Thief 4* is the perfect game to stretch our graphics cards to breaking point.
Probability: 6/1

7 Rope arrows

Grappling hooks, climbing gloves and rope arrows scare game designers. If players can get anywhere at a whim, how do developers build levels? But that's why they're so



exciting for players. Vertical movement opens up new ways to explore the spaces that developers create. Rope arrows were one of the highlights of the early *Thief* games, but they vanished from *Thief 3*. We want them back.
Probability: 10/1

8 No 'win button'

As tense and atmospheric as *Deadly Shadows* was, most of the threats in it could be neutralised with a single, widely available, cheap item: flashbombs. They blinded humans and killed the undead. Cradle creeping you out? Calm down, you can just flashbomb the zombies. Guards on to you? Let them come; you can just blind them and run. Let's not do that again.
Probability: 15/1

9 Mod tools

Thief was an inspiring game; legions of fans created new levels for *Thief 1* and 2, improving dramatically on the original concepts. The game lives on; The Dark Mod is a *Thief*-like total conversion for *Doom 3* that's still being updated six years after the last game. When we've finished the main campaign for *Thief 4*, we'd love to continue to play it long afterwards, via user-made missions, mods and total conversions.
Probability: 50/1

10 Thievery

A controversial one this. Years after the release of the original game, Thievery – an *Unreal Tournament* mod – pitched guards against thieves. It was difficult, unwelcoming and near impossible to find a server with competent players. But when it all came together it was just brilliant, and hauntingly atmospheric. Playing the last surviving guard, knowing that three thieves were still lurking around in the shadows, was truly terrifying. Now, we'd like to see what a full development team could achieve by working with the same ideas.
Probability: 100/1 ■

YOU SUGGEST

I would love to see a large stretch of The City that can be explored, with active NPCs carrying out normal nightly tasks.
@whorak
Larger sandboxes. A mix between *Assassin's Creed* and *Thief* would be awesome.
@Jazz008

I wouldn't say no to a little *Mirror's Edge* mantling and some roof-top shenanigans.
@mattzm
NO SPIDERS!
@Jkeverne
I think that they should turn it into an isometric, squad-based strategy game; just to see what the internet does.
@gonnas

To have your say follow:
@pc_gamer



THE SPY



The Spy will never fall in love ever again.

M

exico. The hotel-room fan is all that's keeping The Spy sane. The comforting whumph of the blades stirs the warm air. The Spy lies naked, sweating on his bed, focusing on the regularity of the rhythm. All around him, on the walls, the ceiling, even the mirror, is one word scrawled over and over and over.

Belle.

It's not The Spy's writing. It's Craig's. Belle and Pearson? Has The Spy's ex cast her spell over him as well? Craig's electronically altered voice on the phone had told The Spy to track him down, that he had fled with a suitcase of money. That was fine. The Spy had worked with Craig for ten years, this would be easy. But then Craig made it personal.

The first place The Spy looked was Valve HQ. Craig had often said he'd hide in Chet Faliszek's beard if things were going down. The Spy drugged and bound the developer and rummaged in his chin-hair, but the tiny Scot was nowhere to be found. Just an empty tin of shortbread.

A list fell out of Chet's pocket, however. Headed 'weaponizer Ep 3 ideas' it described a gun called 'The weaponizer' listing filenames appended 'concrete', 'liquid', 'metal', 'flamethrower', and 'icegun'. What is this 'weaponizer'? Is this an experiment to change or even replace *Half-Life 2*'s signature gravity gun? The Spy doesn't know, but there

are whispers that Gordon Freeman is about to break for cover. The Spy left via zipline.

As the zipline squealed, The Spy's thoughts turned to Belle. Her last communiqué, that Dear John letter, had turned out to have a microdot on it. It was the genetic formula for breeding a cow that could deliver pre-mixed White Russians, Craig's favourite tippie. Was this her way of telling The Spy she'd moved on, and was taking that duplicitous Scottish shortarse with her?

The Spy decided to lay a trap, using George RR Martin's *Game of Thrones* series. Both Belle and Craig were fans. Everyone knows there's a strategy game coming out from Cyanide, but The Spy had dug up talk of a RPG based on the series as well. The Spy had even seen screenshots: it had some very grim looking men in it, with scars and jerkins, and a really, really dark stronghold that could be Winterfell.

The Spy emailed Craig with promises of a hands-on at a castle with many turrets, but got a bounceback. "Sorry: in Mexico. Leave me alone." The Spy's Cryptographic Email Truthalyzer confirmed that Pearson was indeed in Mexico and suggested The Spy

The Spy rummaged in Chet Faliszek's chin-hair

leave him alone. Pfft. A jaunt down the west coast of America was just what The Spy needed: he had business in San Francisco.

The LucasArts compound is always an easy place to crack. This time The Spy disguised himself as George Lucas and wandered around telling everyone he was changing Vader's devastating speech in *The Empire Strikes Back* to: "No, I am your first cousin twice removed." The flurry of activity was the perfect cover. The dirt? LucasArts are hiring for a lot of positions, but one of the games they're working on includes an 'Aerial Combat Title'. While it's not space combat, it could be. Then the Wookiee guards rrrrrrawllled, and The Spy barely escaped with his disguise intact.

Not for the first time, The Spy wished he had the powers of Batman. Or maybe Catwoman. The Spy can confirm, coincidentally, that there will be feline-based DLC for *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. The post launch content will take up her story in a more fulsome manner than the main game.

The Spy was closing in on Belle. The hotel-room graffiti, it turned out, was a map. The Spy copied it down and followed the directions to a remote village. The locals told of a fellow so bearded they thought he was a revolutionary, or an art teacher. They pointed to a jungly opening, and told The Spy to bring swimming shorts.

She was there, with Craig, swimming in a cenote. The water caught the light and illuminated the two of them together, splashing, giggling. It was too much. They were happy. The Spy picked up Craig's briefcase, left them enough money for a nice holiday together, and departed. They were never seen again.

Spy out. ■

The Spy





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MONTHS AWAY

**MODERN WARFARE 3**

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Release **NOVEMBER 8****THE ELDER SCROLLS V SKYRIM**

Christmas comes early for the young tykes of PC Gamer. A new world-wandering, magic-wielding RPG from Bethesda. Fight dragons with swords and shouting.

Release **NOVEMBER 11****ASSASSIN'S CREED REVELATIONS**

Ezio is now 50, but no less nimble. The roof-skipping assassin's final game will tie together the conspiracy and let you zipline around Renaissance Constantinople.

Release **NOVEMBER 18****SAINT'S ROW THE THIRD**

The wacky *Grand Theft Auto*-style crim-sim. Doesn't have *GTA*'s po-face, but it does have the open city, loads of cars and missions, and a giant purple dildo as a weapon.

Release **NOVEMBER 18****LORD OF THE RINGS WAR IN THE NORTH**

Form your own fellowship of three, then melee and magic your way through Middle-Earth's jerks in this cooperative third-person orc-hacking sim.

Release **NOVEMBER 25**

6

MONTHS AWAY

**COUNTER-STRIKE GLOBAL OFFENSIVE**

Valve are rejigging CS for the post-*Modern Warfare* world. New modes, new guns, and it's built both for competitive types and for the newbs. Good news for Rich.

Release **FEBRUARY****THE DARKNESS 2**

Stars a Mafia hitman turned boss, who is also possessed by a demon, and has two tentacles that he uses to eviscerate enemies. It's the world's first quad-wielding first-person shooter.

Release **FEBRUARY****KINGDOMS OF AMALUR: RECKONING**

We've woken up on a mortuary slab in an RPG before, but *Reckoning* is no *Planescape*. Instead, it's a colourful, action-first game chock full of kobolds.

Release **FEBRUARY****ALIENS COLONIAL MARINES**

The ultimate LAN party game. Cooperative xenomorph killing by shooter experts Gearbox. We're quietly excited that they've captured the spirit of the film.

Release **MARCH****MASS EFFECT 3**

It's the final fight for the universe, as the Reapers, those sentient robot things, launch an assault on Earth. Will they succeed in destroying humanity? Not on Shepard's watch.

Release **MARCH**

9+

MONTHS AWAY

**HITMAN ABSOLUTION**

Blood Money's betrayal turns murdering murderer Agent 47 off the leash. The new *Hitman* seems to break free from the conventions of the series, allowing for more action and larger levels.

Release **2012****DOTA 2**

The world of action-RPGs is getting very crowded, but Valve's take on it will be the closest copy of the original *DotA* mod that started it all. They're going to open the beta to everyone, soon.

Release **2012****FAR CRY 3**

Returning to the tropical setting of the original game, the bright and colourful shooter hides a dark and horrible story of someone trying to escape an island of evil people.

Release **2012****SYNDICATE**

Another classic strategy game gets an FPS remake. This time it's the co-op reimagining of a game of corporate killing. Augs let you see through walls and slow down time, while you hunt for secrets.

Release **2012****DISHONORED**

The game that Arkane were formed to make: an emergent, immersive sim where you're an assassin with world-bending powers. It looks like *Deus Ex* crossed with *Half-Life 2*.

Release **2012**

SLIPPED!

Batman: Arkham Asylum

He skidded on some batpoop all the way into November. Why? Warner Bros haven't said.

Serious Sam 3: BFE

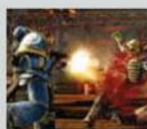
The less-than-serious shooter sequel has scampered back a month, to November 22.

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**Space Marine**

We're not getting *Gears of War 3*, but who cares when we have shoulder pads *this* impressive? Hit things with hammers!

**Bastion**

Cute little indie RPG with the brilliant twist of a narrator who comments on all you do. It adds loads to the experience.

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THE BIG QUIZ



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01 Who is the sinister psychiatrist pulling the strings in the streets of *Arkham City*?

02 What feature did *City of Heroes* popularise that let a rookie team up with a more powerful pal?

03 What game connects these characters?

04 Which fan-favourite actor or actress will not be reprising their *Arkham Asylum*/animated series role for *Arkham City*?

05 Who is the Lord Recluse to *Champions Online*'s Defender?

06 Who is the only superhero to get a Lego licence?

07 According to his catchy song, on whose behalf would *Freedom Force* villain Nuclear Winter turn your land to snow?

08 In *DC Universe Online*, who are the villain-side counterparts of Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman?

09 Which of these was not a cancelled superhero game: *The Indestructibles*, *Agents of Justice*, *Marvel Universe Online*, *Watchmen*.



10 Which villain didn't even warrant a reference in *Arkham Asylum*: Black Mask, King Tut, The Mad Hatter, Clayface, Ra's Al Ghul.

11 Which company filed a lawsuit against *City of Heroes* creators Cryptic for allowing players to recreate its iconic characters?

12 In *Prototype*, what elemental weakness kept Alex Mercer trapped in New York City?

13 In *Arkham City*, what is Cat Woman's equivalent of Detective Mode called?

14 *DC Universe Online* recently released its first proper expansion to tie into which big-budget box-office bomb?

15 Which of these is not a *City of Heroes* Power Set: Plant Control, Pain Domination, Holy Light, Ninjitsu.

16 Which era of comics were the *Freedom Force* games based on?

17 Which comic hero or heroes got the dubious honour of starring in a commercial *Total Conversion* mod for *Quake*?

18 Which 21st century superhero licence's only online FAQ asks 'why are you playing this game?' and calls it 'even worse than the movie'?

19 Which superhero did developers Treyarch take to surprising glory before moving over to the *Call of Duty* series?

20 What was the amazing power of the Superhero League of Hoboken's leader The Crimson Tape?



HOW DID YOU DO?

WHAT LEVEL OF MENACE ARE YOU READY TO TAKE ON?



0-5
Dead Thomas Wayne



6-10
Foxbat



11-15
Ghost Widow



16-19
Lego Harley Quinn



20
Joker

01 Doctor Hugo Strange
02 Arkham City, All the actors who played them are in it (Mark Hamill: Ripburger/Joker, Grey delisle: Jeanette/ Catwoman, Nolan North: Space Core/Penguin, Troy Baker: Booker de Wit/ Two-Face.)
03 Aileen Sorokin (Harley Quinn)
04 Dr Destroyer
05 Batman
06 The Motherland
07 The Joker, Lex Luthor, Circe
08 Watchmen, Saddy
09 King Tut
10 Marvel
11 Thief Vision
12 Green Lantern
13 Holy Light
14 Silver
15 X-Men
16 Catwoman
17 Spider-Man
18 Creating
19 Organisational charts. (Fear him!)

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Gamaniania

Karl Hsu: don't make him angry!

Defending the world from hack attack

The head of security for Gamania, Taiwan's biggest MMO publisher, explains how online theft is big business in every sense

Karl Hsu is a chain-smoking savant who toasts to world peace, and is also the head of security for Taiwan's largest MMO publisher, Gamania. He's a former hacker, a former employee of Taiwan's National Security Bureau, a former 'bad boy', and I'm here to talk to him about the incredibly organised and sophisticated hacker groups that target videogame players.

Hsu's job is a big one: Gamania have published the Taiwanese versions of such MMO smash hits as *Lineage* (3.5 million Taiwanese players in 2003), *Maple Story* (over 100 million global signups over its lifetime) and *Kart Riders* (3.8 million Taiwanese players at its peak).

In 2003, Hsu was still working for the Taiwanese government and wanted a real challenge: "I wanted to fight against and see the real action."

At around this time, Gamania suffered the first serious attack on its

systems. They thought they needed a professional team to combat this, so they phoned Hsu. "The hackers hadn't reached the game servers, the core systems, and we isolated them – but they had still got into the QA environment," Hsu reveals.

Hsu then joined Gamania, and that first attack would turn out to be a clumsy fumble compared to what was coming.

"The terrifying thing is that these viruses are rarely the work of individuals"

"In 2004, gamers began to tell us Gamania had been hacked because their items had been stolen. We started to research this situation, and it turned out that these players had a virus on their computer, a kind of back door that hackers could steal items through. This is how a virus is classified: first, what type it is,



Rich says...
Hsu's biggest bugbear was ineffective legislation. "Some countries do have laws that recognise online theft," he says, "but often they're focused on personal identity or privacy, not on valuables. Governments won't make the laws we need."

then what category it is, and then the virus name is last. It turned out that this virus was named 'Gamaniania'. It was designed exactly to target Gamania players."

I want it all

Stealing items was the primary goal for the Gamania virus, but as online identities have become more enmeshed with real life, so malicious software has become ever-more insidious. Hsu breaks down how a recent example operated. "In the old days, you'd get a virus and the virus would start working when it got into the computer. They don't do this any more. Instead, they just sit there and operate only when they need to. That's the first change in behaviour."

"The second behaviour is that they now check your entire system: your MSN, your Word docs, Excel files, activity logs, PDFs – everything. The virus packs the information together, then it encrypts it, chops it into many small files, makes them hidden files,

HOW HACKERS MAKE MONEY FROM MSN

Hsu talks us through how chat logs can be turned into cash

1. "This happened last year: some gamers had their MSN account hacked, and the hackers didn't just get their ID and passwords, but their entire conversation logs."

2. "This hacker group must have set up a new department devoted to MSN – an IM team. They start to read this log. They have access to the account and I'm your friend who talks to you a lot, so they know I'm a good friend."

3. "They pop up, using your ID and password, and say to you, 'Hey Karl, can you get me a \$50 pre-payment card? I'm travelling in Taiwan and I need it right now.'"

4. "And because I'm your friend, I'll go and buy this scratchcard and read the number across MSN. This is very common now. They have people actually sitting there talking to you."

and sends them out one by one. It can't send a couple of megabytes because you might notice, so they do it slowly. It will detect when you're using your PC through keystrokes or mouse movement and stay still."

Think about the PCs you use in your life, and how much minutiae must be hidden in forgotten archives: auto log-ins, invoices or tax returns, personal correspondence. The thought of a crook with all that is terrifying – as is the realisation that these viruses are rarely the work of individuals. The groups behind them deal with the information as efficiently as any legitimate business, down to departments dedicated to specific data. They don't just want virtual items, but everything else too.

China crisis

"This is how the system works in China," Hsu says. "There is one place a friend of mine knows of with a big machine room – more than 1,000 servers. They have one team that will write the virus. If the virus reports back with information, they will have another program that categorises it – this is from MSN Messenger, this is from a website, this is from a bank – and these things are then sent to different groups. Some people will work only with financial sites, and some with the online games accounts. Everybody has an MSN or Yahoo or Google account, and a lot

have the same password for each and never change them."

Hsu has much more to say than this about legal grey areas, and how hackers transfer items by passing-the-parcel between constantly created dummy accounts. Even if Gamania trace an IP to a specific address in China, the authorities won't cooperate. "We track the IPs and then we find out they originate in China – and, sorry, they don't even want to know."

Hsu does an impression of a police bureaucrat: "You want to come to my country and get my guys? No

way, unless you prove that there's a crime.' And legally, a lot of this theft is often *not* a crime."

Talking to Hsu is fascinating, but it's easy to come away depressed: as he reels off case study after example after anecdote, it's clear there is a lot of highly inventive and genuinely malicious software out there. "It's not one hacker or even a small group of geeks," says Hsu. "It's people making serious money – it's an industry."

Fighting a virus

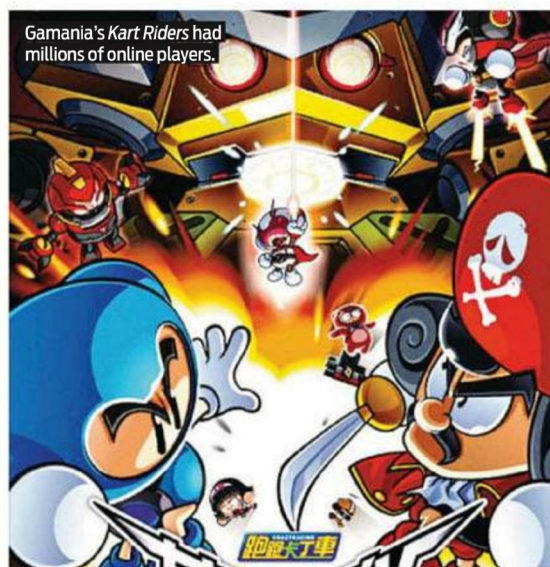
"My message to gamers is this: education, education, education," says Hsu. "If you know about the dangers, you'll be careful. But if gamers say, 'No, it's not my responsibility,' then they'll have a problem."

"For our part, the strategy is a quick response. We are the guys who are always falling behind. There's a new virus, and then you have the new medicine, but you don't have medicine for a disease that doesn't exist. We can't do anything about people who play Gamania games downloading things they shouldn't."

Players should be more cautious: it's not exactly a once-in-a-lifetime soundbite, but then Hsu doesn't seem like the type for fancy words and easy solutions.

The industry certainly has its responsibilities, including educating gamers and pressuring governments for better legal protection. As for players, it's not that we should all take up knitting instead, but it's worth remembering that this wonderful industry has organised greed clinging to its underside, trying to steal whatever it can. It helps to know that there are people like Hsu fighting the good fight. So do him a favour: update your antivirus, and raise a glass to world peace. ■

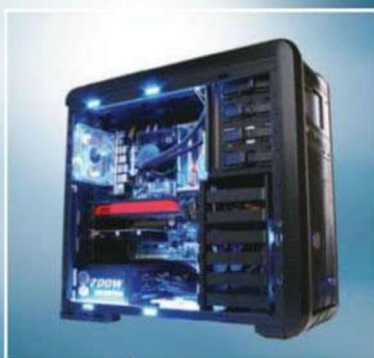
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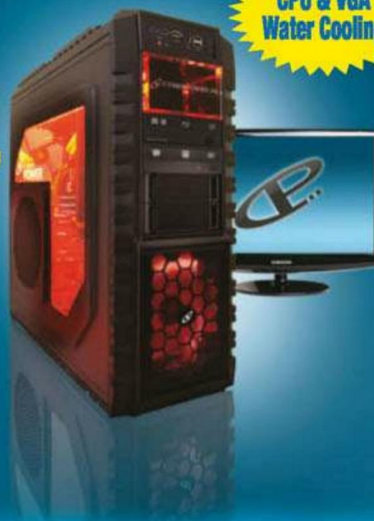
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PREVIEW

"He's got a torch! Shoot him!"



BATTLEFIELD 3

PLAYED IT *Operation Metro* proves that you don't need tanks to succeed.

We found ourselves cornered in a tiny underground room. I was tempted to just give up – I could hang some drapes, get some doilies, make this room a home – but my squadmates disagreed. They were determined to make a push for *Operation Metro*'s objective. Despite the open stretch of station platform beyond the door, lit up by half a dozen laser sights combing the area. Despite the scope glint of some snipers deeper down the tunnel, and despite a couple of grenades sailing in. Wait. Grenades. Take cover!

We dashed away from the door as the grenades detonated, putting cracks in the doorway. We could hear sub-machinegun fire slamming into the other side of the wall. This was going to be tough.

I was playing the Assault class. Formerly the most useless of the four in *Bad Company 2*, he can now throw down medical packs to heal teammates, and use defibrillators to bring

them back from the dead. I started tossing bags of medicine around the room as our team took potshots through the door.

The squad system is central to the ebb and flow of *Battlefield 3*'s scraps. Dead members of any four-man unit can spawn on one of the surviving members, giving that player spawn points for staying alive long enough to get his companions back

"There was a distant whoosh, a shuddering crunch and the wall was suddenly torn away"

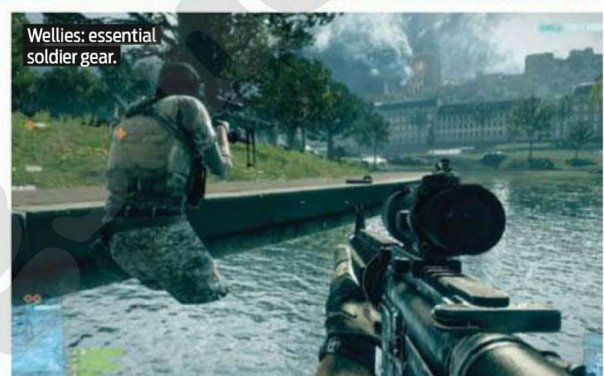
into the fight. That way, single players can infect small areas. If you see one man run behind a rock, five minutes later he becomes four men with med packs, defibrillators and rocket launchers. Low walls or a burned-out bus can become vital if a squad moves in and starts picking fabrics. That's what we were trying to do in our tiny room, and I was starting to think we'd picked a bad place when our home suddenly became much larger.

There was a distant whoosh, a shuddering crunch and the wall was torn away. Light poured in, followed by a storm of bullets. There are no tanks for Engineers to target in *Operation Metro*, but that doesn't mean rocket launchers are useless. *Battlefield 3*'s levels can be blown apart. Grenades can crack cover and scatter shards of debris. Rockets can tear buildings to pieces. They do a good job on soldiers, too. As the smoke cleared, we saw another rocket hurtling towards us.

My teammates scrambled for the safety of the corridor. I just stood and watched. *Battlefield 3* looks incredible. Even in the cold fluorescent light of the metro station, the flashing gun fire, smoke and shattering scenery make the claustrophobic corridors feel exciting and dangerous. The fiery trail of the rocket illuminated the tunnel before slamming into the floor a few metres short. We retreated behind a cluster of metal cabinets as the storm of incoming lead sparked against the makeshift cover. The beautiful lighting of the *Frostbite 2* engine isn't there just to make war look pretty, it can be a weapon too. A few teammates

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battlefield3.com

The squad system is crucial to your hopes of staying alive.



flicked on the high powered lamps on the underside of their guns, throwing white spotlights onto the walls. Any enemy caught in the glare would find themselves blinded. The downside is the lamps give away your position. Another rocket sailed past and put a small crater in the wall.

Then the assault began. We returned fire, cutting down some Engineers. A squadmate called Moofers planted his weapon on a cabinet. The new Support class have access to devastating light machineguns. They can unfold their weapon's bipod and plant it on the ground to make it more accurate. Fire erupted from Moofers' barrel as he sprayed bullets towards the muzzle flash of a cluster of enemy Assault soldiers. It didn't matter if he hit anything; near misses can suppress enemies, causing their screen to become hazy and sending their accuracy haywire.

A moment later he was dead, nailed in the face by a sniper bullet. Scope glint lets you see snipers from vast distances and reduces the likelihood of being killed by an opponent you had no chance of spotting. I dashed over to Moofers and zapped him

with my defibrillator pads. He sprang back up, right as rain. Then an enemy Engineer came out of the corridor behind. I whipped out my pistol and shot him several times in the chest. He died. I brought up my assault rifle and started to help my squadmate fill the carriage with bullets. Numbers started ticking across my screen. I was gaining points by the bucketload. Suppression bonus! Enemy down! Headshot! This is brilliant, I thought. I'm doing war!

Then my view was filled with the face of an enemy Engineer. As I collapsed, I saw the knife he'd used to finish me. Before you die in *Battlefield 3*, you spend a moment on the floor with one hand outstretched, begging for help. I reached out to my squadmate, oblivious to the Engineer behind him. The enemy grabbed him by the neck and raised the knife. Moofers, no!

I felt sad for a second, but then, ooh! I'd levelled up! Hey, a new gun barrel! Three seconds later, I was back running through corridors. Even without tanks or jets, *Battlefield 3* is intense, dramatic and beautiful. It's going to be fantastic ■

Tom Senior

Release **OCTOBER 28**

PREVIEW

Kingdoms is a traditional singleplayer RPG.

A Dokkalfar. Also known as an elf.

"You cad! Turn off that electromagnet!"

KINGDOMS OF AMALUR RECKONING

FIRST LOOK A brainless, fun and happily clichéd RPG.

I've been spoiled by RPGs. A man came up to me in the forests of Amalur, growling like a dog. "Two-legs!" he said. "Two-legs, I've been cursed. I am a wolf, doomed to walk the forest as a human."

Ahhh, I thought. I know this one. The unconvincing gait, the pseudo-Furry voice-acting. He'll be a delusional mentalist, and after I've done his quest, it'll turn out he was a human all along.

Into the woods I potted, to activate the shrines that would 'turn him back'. Very good joke, *Reckoning* writers! Curse lifted, I returned to my friend to find he was now a wolf. "Thank you, two-legs!" he growled, before loping off.

Either I'm too cynical, or *Reckoning*'s third-person RPGery is simplistic. Yet

what the game lacks in knowing questline winks and voiceover budget, it gains in charming fantasy bashing. In the process of helping Dr Van Wolfington, I had to carve a swathe through

the local wildlife so great the ecosystem might never recover.

It was breezily simplistic: left clicks for standard attacks, right for magic. You can be warrior, rogue or mage, but you don't have to make an immutable class choice at an arbitrary point. Your specialisation is based your clothes, weapons and the points you plug into magic, dexterity and

"I could retreat to a safe distance, clench my fist, and watch as they burst into flames"

strength trees. Jacks-of-all-trades who cycle through weapons are possible.

I based my class choice on my looks. Tempted by an offensively ginger moustache in the character creation screen, I dressed my dark-skinned Dokkalfar (elf, to you and me) in magic robes and handed him a magic staff. Only a mage could get away with such pompous facial hair. That weapon choice made my standard three-hit combo a set of

gloriously colourful magic gusts, each increasing in power. Against little groups of traditional fantasy foes – look, real life kobolds! – I was overpowered. But when I delved too deep into the dungeons to complete *Reckoning*'s fantasy-standard quests – kill some things, bring me their noses – I had to ditch the staff and break out my more powerful moves.

Over two hours, I unlocked two key spells. The first was a weighty ball of lightning, but I had more fun with the second, where I could mark up to four enemies with little embers. I could then retreat to a safe distance, clench my fist, and watch as they burst into flames.

Get sufficient kills and you can enter 'reckoning' mode, where your attacks do more damage and everything gets a neat blue tinge. Stun an enemy in this mode and you'll get a few seconds to execute a similarly hefty finishing move.

Reckoning might be simplistic, but it is lightweight in a way that puts me in mind of a more streamlined and less overwrought version of the *Fable* games. ■

Rich McCormick

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ea.com/uk/reckoning

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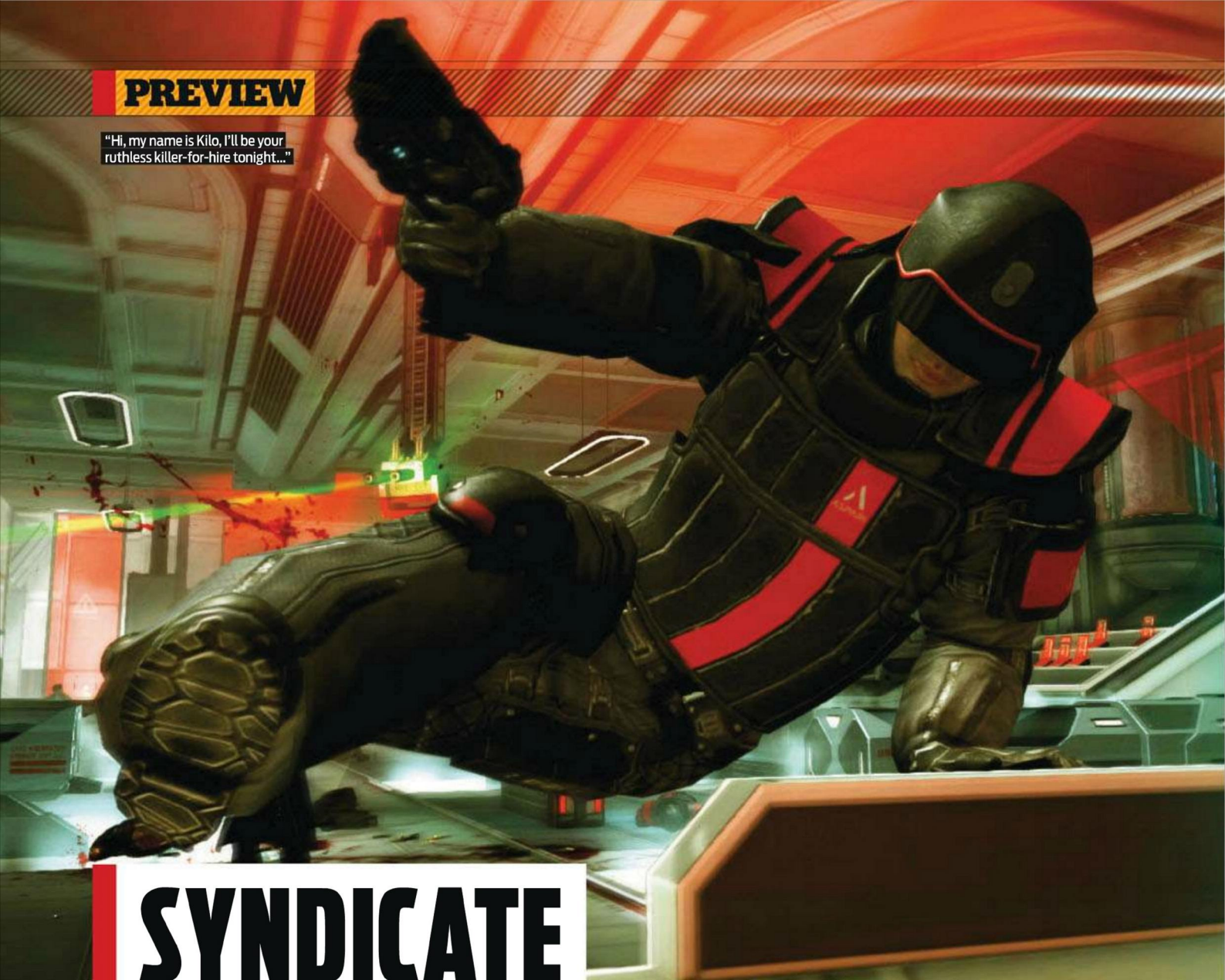
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PREVIEW

"Hi, my name is Kilo, I'll be your ruthless killer-for-hire tonight..."



SYNDICATE

FIRST LOOK Goddamn corporations, being all corporate.

Syndicate – like its top-down, squad-based predecessor – imagines a future war between merciless corporations, fought by hyper-trained and utterly amoral killers. These corporations are sinister and faceless business octopi, with tentacles in every industrial pie. They're the world's largest and most influential companies. Were this real life, the player would be working for a 2069 version of Apple.

Instead, *Syndicate*'s main character, Miles Kilo, works for the worryingly bland-sounding Eurocorp Syndicate. The game's developers, Starbreeze, haven't said what Eurocorp sell yet, but the company puts its name on guns. Any business happy to plaster their name on the barrel of a rifle isn't going to be too altruistic.

Miles has a suite of abilities suited to murdering people. He can use his employees' guns to insert bullets into their heads, of course, but that's the boring approach. He's got a

better option already jammed inside his own skull. The Dart 6 chip is standard issue for the wealthy half of Earth's population, and serves as a tiny PC inside the user's head. Sounds ideal, I know, but that chip's not just there to let you play *Minecraft* on the train: it actively informs buying habits and creates consumers.

The corporations control the stream of information flowing into chipped-up

"*Syndicate*'s main character Miles Kilo has a suite of abilities suited to murdering people"

heads, and Eurocorp want to wrest majority control away from their competitors to make people buy more of their socks (or whatever it is they sell).

Miles Kilo's Dart 6 chip is weapons-grade, and a step above the chips of 2069's anti-Eurocorpers. Point at an enemy, activate your chip, and you get to see *Syndicate*'s trump card: 'breaching'. Kilo can hack into his opponent's chip and, once

secreted inside their brain, he has a number of gruesome options.

Select the 'suicide' option, and you can enjoy the grisly spectacle of your chosen foe putting his weapon in his mouth and blasting his brains all over a back wall. Select 'backfire', and you'll overload his weapon, toasting his fingers and sending his nearby chums to the floor with the resultant explosion. Go for 'allegiance', and you can make a temporary mind-pact with your target, forcing him to focus his gun on his once-friends before, yet again, shooting himself in the head.

Somewhat fortunately for the sake of our humanity, players can't just run around suggesting that people kill themselves and cackling as they do. Dart powers take time to recharge, but can also be upgraded. How? In typically grisly *Syndicate* style: by reaching into the gooey heads of your fallen foes, pulling out their implanted circuitry, and jamming it into your own ear.

Your Dart chip's power over the world extends to inanimate objects. Get your timing right and you can hack grenades as they sail towards you, leaving them to

READ ME
PUBLISHER
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Starbreeze
LINK
ea.com/syndicate



No gnat-bite bad-guy bullets here... these ones hurt.



Did we mention that Kilo's gun can shoot round corners? Drool.



Dart Vision – infinitely better than ChuckleVision.



When mind control isn't an option, shoot 'em in the face.



Skintight lizard Lycra will be all the rage on the catwalks in 2069.



The future's bright... and extremely violent.

clatter harmlessly onto the floor like sad potatoes. Hacking becomes necessary on some of the tougher enemies: Starbreeze talk of Kilo stripping the armour from a souped-up tank-man with his chip, before riddling him with holes from his gun. Which, it should be noted, can fire round corners. It is the *future*, after all.

Getting the timing right when completing breaches and hacks peppers firefights with small moments of challenge, which pay out in 'IPA points'. These points power a slow-motion ability called Dart Vision that makes singling out incoming grenades and defusing them a little simpler, and lets you analyse firefights more easily.

Selecting your breach target is as easy as lining them up in your crosshairs and activating the ability, but timing it right – like taking a swing in a golf sim – will reap more IPA points. It's a system that tacitly rewards stylish play, wheedling players into perfecting timings and using their abilities to get the maximum rewards.

But how does Kilo cope when he can't just crawl inside the cranial cavities of his victims and rewire their frontal lobes? Not

everyone in *Syndicate's* future can afford a Dart 6 chip and, strangely, that can make them more dangerous. Society is split into 'Up' and 'Down' Zones, and the denizens of Down areas are less likely to have the cash necessary for a chip. But they're still ferocious fighters, and all of Kilo's technical woo-hoo won't make a dent on their fully-organic brainpans. Lucky, then, that he can fall back on old-fashioned combat tactics: put bullet in face to win.

Syndicate's combat looks advanced. Enemies aren't glued to crates, doomed to poke their heads above a parapet until they're popped off by an opportunistic player. They switch cover, and their bullets are as painful to you as yours are to them.

The switch from top-down squad management makes more sense for *Syndicate* than it does for *XCOM*. Those who pine for the return of the series do so not for the squad-management mechanics and clunky combat, but for that game's dark dystopia and humour. In this reboot, it looks like they'll be able to see the same thing at a much closer vantage point. ■

Rich McCormick

Release FEB 2012

PREVIEW

Back when men were men, suits were sharp and hats were worn.

LA NOIRE

PLAYED IT Crack crime in the most expensive adventure game ever made

This looks like a Rockstar game, and if smell-o-vision had been invented, I'd hazard a guess that the whiff of burnt rubber, gunpowder and millions of dollars would hang smokily in the air. It has gunfights, car chases and an open city (an atmospheric recreation of LA that's dominated by the Hollywood sign), but *LA Noire* actually has more in common with LucasArts' adventure games than *Grand Theft Auto*. The heart of the game is a hunt for clues.

The character whose shoes you're stepping into is the oddly volatile Cole Phelps. He's the rising star of the LA detective squad, moving through the various desks that the crimes are meted out to: burglary, traffic, vice and arson.

The game is episodic, with roughly hour-long investigations. How it works: the deed takes place, then Cole and his assigned partner are given the location. The city mostly exists as a backdrop as he travels from place to place, with

the emergent moments you expect from a Rockstar game conspicuously absent. It's about atmosphere: a leisurely drive to the weary jazz tones that curl from the radio; the lovely, weighty old cars pottering around the city on the way to a roped-off crime scene and a mutilated body.

That's what usually happens, anyway. When I got my hands on the PC port

"I pored over photos, tracked down leads, met a corrupt cop and it all ended in a shootout"

at Rockstar's London offices, however, Cole and his partner were dragged into a tale of industrial espionage and eccentric millionaires, following an explosion at the Nicholson Electroplating factory. Instead of the head detective handing out the case, I followed the mushroom cloud to LA's newest hole and got my detective hat on.

Detecting criminal activity began with Cole wandering the scene of the explosion. Clues are subtly suggested by

a plink of a piano and Cole looking in the rough direction of the potential case breaker, or by another officer calling for attention. Sometimes what grabs his attention is nothing: a shoe that I pick up and look at that adds nothing to Cole's notebook. When it's relevant – in this case, a scrap of cloth – you pick it up and turn it over, looking for a deeper meaning.

In my investigation, it turned out to be a laundry tag. I added the name of the shop to the case files and carried on. More clues were found: a suitcase with a ridiculous amount of spy material inside – a tiny camera, an incongruous golden earring and a decipher wheel (forming a minigame) that let me crack a code and uncover another address.

The detective work is oddly satisfying and rarely frustrating. All the clues are recorded in Cole's notebook and if they result in an address, you can head there, or you can use the notes in interrogations.

Part of the game's charm is the technology that's been used to digitise the actors' performances. It's supposed to give you an edge during questioning:

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Nosferatu had accidentally wandered into the wrong game.



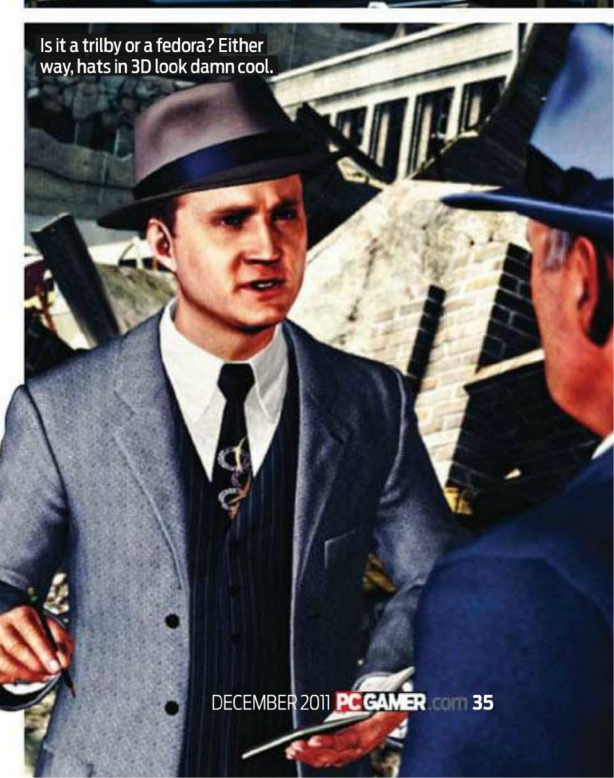
There are plenty of cool cadavers for you to prod.



A giant explosion? That, my friend, is most definitely A Clue.



In LA, kids, it's a good idea to talk to strangers in big cars.



Is it a trilby or a fedora? Either way, hats in 3D look damn cool.

when Cole chats to witnesses or victims, there are subtle performance clues – fidgeting and shifty eyes that hint of the character's role in the crime. I still found it better to rely on my memory of the evidence, which is easy to check, and press them on that basis.

It's not entirely successful: the choices of Truth, Doubt or Lie sometimes feel like a trap. I didn't feel comfortable with the evidence and yet I *had* to make a call at every stage of the conversation. The game fudges this a little by letting you back out of a lie accusation, where you need to present evidence to support your claim. If you can't present a contradiction from your notepad, you back off and express Doubt.

It's a system that has its flaws, but you can make mistakes and still solve the case. I expressed Doubt to Nicholson Electroplating's manager when the correct answer was Lie, but still had the information to get me to the next link in the crime chain.

Slowly, by rummaging through several scenes for clues, including

Howard Hughes's Spruce Goose, the case emerges. The explosion was part of a dangerous process to chemically polish aluminium. The process is worth millions, and the disaster highlighted the fact that the creator of the process was going to sell it from under his boss's nose.

It's a gnarly tale to untangle: I pored over photographs, tracked down leads, met a corrupt cop and the whole thing ended up in a shootout.

The PC port includes all available DLC. In fact, this level was from that selection of additional cases. Its also got mappable controls and 3D support – which, because of the game's leisurely pace, worked quite well when I popped the goggles on.

The tech seemed stronger than Rockstar's typically shaky PC translations, but this was in the walled garden of their offices. My detective work also discovered that it will be using Steam achievements, ditching Games for Windows Live. Another one bites the dust, Microsoft. ■

Craig Pearson

Release NOVEMBER

PREVIEW

Snipe, sneak or shoot like mad – you can still battle your way.

Grim and smoggy – it's like fighting in Middlesbrough.

The machine gun is okay, but to show off, you need the Zeus!

Some people take their dislike of pigeons to the extreme.

COUNTER-STRIKE GLOBAL OFFENSIVE

PLAYED IT Valve are tinkering with a classic, but why – and why now?

Since shortly after its first beta release back in 1999, this tactical, team-based *Half-Life* mod has dominated the competitive first-person shooter scene, while countless hours of community yelling have made it a tight, balanced experience. A brief foray onto consoles in 2003 failed to expand the audience away from its PC home, so why are Valve attempting to create what they're calling the 'definitive' version of a game that people like just fine as it is?

"We had been looking to create an XBLA version of *Counter-Strike: Source* as a sort of nostalgia thing," explains Chet Faliszek, whose role on the game is loosely defined as 'writer'. "But pretty quickly we began to realise how much we liked the game and it grew to something bigger."

The team have decided to make some changes to the tried and tested formula. Classic maps such as Dust have been tweaked and, while other stalwarts such as Inferno and Nuke

will return, they're joined by new maps designed specifically for the Arsenal modes. The new modes are based on the popular *Counter-Strike: Source* mod Gun Game, in which players start with a pistol and earn a new weapon with each consecutive kill. Many of these new environments are said to be inspired by

"Global Offensive is a PC experience... there is no auto-aim; it is absolutely a game of skill"

other titles in the Valve canon, though they're holding back specifics.

The graphics have also undergone an overhaul, though they could hardly be described as beautiful so much as robustly functional. Eight new weapons have been added too. These pack tactical characteristics, as well as additional firepower. For example, the Molotov cocktail is intended as much for blocking off areas of the map as causing damage to enemies. Meanwhile, the Zeus is a one-

use, Taser-style weapon that costs an eye-watering \$1,000 of your load-out bank.

Playing it though, it's very much the *Counter-Strike* you'll be familiar with, and Faliszek is keen to emphasise that the experience hasn't been compromised through its shared appearance on consoles. "This is absolutely a PC experience," he says. "One of the rules we had is that it's going to be *Counter-Strike*, *Counter-Strike*, *Counter-Strike*. There is no auto-aim; it's absolutely a game of skill. PC players will still be able to mod the game, host dedicated servers and all of the things that have made *Counter-Strike* such an enduring experience."

Indeed, Valve looked carefully at what the community were doing in *Counter-Strike* and borrowed traits, including shorter round times and even entire match modes. *Counter-Strike* has always grown up in public, shaped by the rallying calls of the people who love it the most. While Valve are claiming *CS:GO* will be the definitive version, it's still the community that will decide its future. ■

Simon Parkin

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Rabbits: don't you just want to judo-throw them?

OVERGROWTH

PLAYED IT Why Wolfire's indie fighting game is worth keeping an eye on.

At the time of writing, the latest feature indie developers Wolfire have put into *Overgrowth* is the ability for weapons to slash open wounds in the characters they hit, from which blood spurts and trickles realistically down their clothing. But that's OK: they're rabbits.

This is a fighting game about bipedal animals kick-boxing and lacerating each other with knives in huge open levels. The animals aren't really the remarkable thing: the game is interesting for the fluid and physical way they connect with each other in combat. The game blends predetermined animations with physics, so that characters can be knocked about convincingly mid-roundhouse – and recover to do the same to you.

So, er, why are they rabbits again? “The game will have some really disturbing depictions of blood and pain,” says David Rosen, “and I don't know if I could handle doing that

with human characters.”

That's not the only reason. As David says: “I suspect that audiences are hungry for novel experiences and settings, and would rather see something new than yet another game about masked ninjas.”

Overgrowth is in the alpha stage of development, and if you preorder it now you'll get the current version. It's still a

“I didn't intend to make an engine. I just wanted to make the game I had in my head”

proof of concept at the moment: a few arenas to choose from with a few opponents each, but no context for the fights except some spectacular scenery. It's hard to get a sense of what kind of game it'll be, so I asked David.

“This isn't final yet, but our plan is to have three categories of missions that you can choose – story, challenge and arena missions. The story missions focus on the characters in the world and how your

actions affect them. The challenge levels are all about exploring the game mechanics and demonstrating your proficiency with them. The arena levels follow a professional entertainment fighter through his career, focusing on acquiring new abilities and equipment.”

The levels in the alpha are huge dramatic landscapes with weird stone relics and tall mountains. You can scamper across them with inhuman speed, leap huge distances, and even scramble up ledges and wall-run smoothly. There's a really slick 3D platformer in here somewhere.

Given that they're a small indie team making an ambitious game from scratch, is all this fancy engine stuff necessary?

“I didn't intend to make an engine,” David says. “I just wanted to make the game I had in my head, so I added one necessary component after another... eventually it all combined to form a pretty complex engine, but it's all designed specifically for this game.”

That means the various systems fit together seamlessly.

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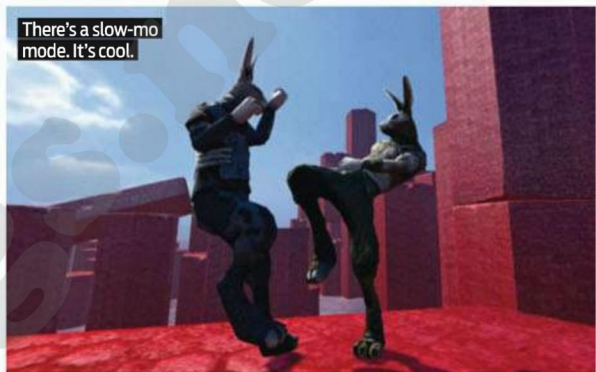
PUBLISHER
Wolfire
Games

DEVELOPER
In-house

LINK
blog.wolfire.com



If your enemy has a weapon and you don't, dodge.



There's a slow-mo mode. It's cool.



The sheer drops give you a quick way out of a fight.



You can knock weapons out of enemy hands.



The story involves rabbits, dogs, wolves and cats.



A mutually painful exchange of feet.

"There's no shift between movement and combat modes," David tells me. "You can smoothly jump out of a fight to wall-run up a wall at any time, without having to 'tear' yourself away from the combat system."

That system is pretty simple: there's an 'attack' and a 'block' button, and the rest is all movement. David says it's about putting the complexity elsewhere.

"To attack in *Overgrowth*, you hold the left mouse to signal your intent, and then trigger the attack by moving within range of an enemy. This brings the focus up from low-level button presses to tactical positioning and awareness, and allows for fast and complex movement."

Blocking prevents a blow from flooring you, but if it's powerful you'll still see your character reel from the physical force of it. Attacking after a successful block lets you throw your opponent, and duck-attacks sweep their legs from beneath them. The AI loves that one – I've lost a lot of fights where I try a roundhouse and they duck under it and trip me.

Fights end fast: one or two good blows

can kill you, and even if they don't, you'll be lucky to get back on your feet before the AI kicks you to death. Or stabs you with the spear they picked up. The same goes for them, of course, so the instant you get in range of each other is critical.

I worry that it might be a little *too* fast right now: Wolfire's own videos of the game feature elegant exchanges of blocked and dodged blows that I've never come close to. But release is a long way off, and by letting preorderers play the game in development, they've got plenty of feedback to work from.

It's a big project: they've been working on it for three years and expect it to take one or two more. But we're talking about it now because it's starting to take shape: the movement is fluid and the combat is fun. There's still no 'game' to it in the broader sense – if you're only interested in how the current build plays, *Overgrowth* probably isn't worth the \$30 preorder yet. But if you want to follow its development into a proper game, now is a good time to get involved. ■

Tom Francis

Release 2012

PREVIEW

"When this horrid war's finally over, I'm going to relax and go fishing."

The choice of weapons will be vast, and historically accurate.

"He marched them up to the top of the hill..."

It's red roses versus white roses all over again.

WAR OF THE ROSES

FIRST LOOK It's flowers versus flowers in this medieval murderfest.

As he fell from his horse at the battle of Bosworth Field, Plantagenet king Richard III called out "lol wtf gief horse".

This Richard III will be sitting at his PC, playing medieval multiplayer-focused battler *War of the Roses*. Developers Fatshark, who made Wild West shooter *Lead and Gold*, are including a cursory singleplayer campaign in their upcoming game, but as studio head Martin Wahlund explains, the emphasis is on multiplayer.

"We want a huge skill component like *Mount & Blade*, but we'd also like to make it a bit more accessible. It should feel natural: like the way you start playing *Battlefield* or *Modern Warfare*. You don't have to be a pro before you start playing, so when you get attacked you should get a feeling for how to defend yourself."

How you'll both defend and attack is still being hammered down this early in development, but Fatshark are set on using *Mount & Blade*-a-like mouse motions to swing,

jab, or fire your weapons. Martin outlines lots of depth in his combat explanations, and the game is filled with potential weapon combinations. Armour can affect the speed of your character and their ability on horseback, and shields can parry attacks but may also break under sustained axe-y onslaughts.

Would-be knights who want to try their hands at the Middle Ages' pointiest toys

"We want a huge skill component like *Mount & Blade*, but we'd also like it to be more accessible"

will be spoilt for choice: players can use swords, axes, spears, bows, and maybe even guns. "They had some gunpowder weapons at the time, but we haven't decided yet if they'll be in the game."

Historical accuracy is important in *War of the Roses*, and that means period battlefields. Martin won't commit to a playercount yet for fear of over or undershooting the end result, but it's safe

to say we won't be playing with the Grand Old Duke's ten thousand men.

Our Bosworth battles will be on smaller skirmish maps: still sizeable enough to manoeuvre heavy horses around, but given a definite War of the Roses flavour, something Martin says is "very important".

The core multiplayer mode will be objective-based, and Martin's keen to emphasise team play in achieving these. "We're looking into a squad spawn mechanic like *Battlefield's*: if you're an archer, join an archer squad; if you're a knight, spawn in the middle of the field."

Whether you're archer, knight or village idiot depends on your unlocks and your levels. "We level you in a horizontal way. We're trying to avoid high-level players always winning against low-level players. Levelling should be more about variety and new types of styles."

Poor Richard III. If only the doomed king had bought into *War of the Roses'* unlock system earlier, he'd have had time to level up his mount. His kingdom for a horse of +2 armour. ■

Rich McCormick

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DIABLO III

PLAYED IT The good and the bad from *Diablo III*'s beta.

Diablo III is two games at the moment: the gorgeous but cruelly brief beta version that we can play as much as we like, and the tantalisingly complex long-term game that we know it becomes later on.

The beta stops around the time your character reaches level 8, but all of their 37 skills are right there in the interface. You actually start to wonder: how many times would I have to replay these quests to grind up to level 30?

The beta also shows a beautifully crisp version of the simple format that made the first two games work: your clicks lead a hero, small on the screen, to fire off sparkly spells at flimsy mobs, levelling rapidly and hoovering up loot.

Pleasingly, Blizzard have put enormous effort into making it feel right: every swipe, smack and crumple both looks and sounds perfect. It's the first *Diablo* with ragdoll physics and it embraces it with gusto: frazzled

zombies pinwheel from electrical blasts, skeletons backflip from maul thwacks, and imps are knocked flying by arrows. It makes every kill satisfying, even when you're hacking through 100 monsters a minute.

But the beta is also a glimpse of the potential problems with *Diablo III*. The game requires you to be online and

"Every kill is satisfying, even when you're hacking through 100 monsters a minute"

logged in at all times, even to play in the single-player mode.

We all know whether that's going to be inconvenient for us or not, but the beta also reveals subtleties to it that weren't instantly obvious from the announcement itself. For one, there's the problem of lag. Not from Blizzard's end, so far as I've seen, but if you share an internet connection or do anything else with it while you play, you may

well see a pause between your blow connecting and the impact effect.

Anyone who plays multiplayer games is used to freeing up their connection to get a good response time, of course, but it stings to have to go through that hassle even when you want to play alone. And for anyone with a connection that isn't fast enough to play MMOs, this is going to be a constant issue.

The other concern about *Diablo III* is the auction house that enables players to buy and sell in-game items for real money. That isn't in the beta, but the gold auction house is: it just works on in-game currency. The series has never had a centralised system for trading items with other players before, and now that it does, you can see why. The random generation of loot allows for extremely powerful items to drop, and the auction house makes it trivial to find and purchase the one with the best damage or armour rating for your class.

Prices currently range between 1,000 to 10,000 gold, and you generally end up with about 4,000 gold by the end of

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Two-handed weapons are devastating.



The Witch Doctor fights zombies with other, stinkier zombies. 3 Gold



Even by the final boss, the beta is a bit too easy.



These guys burst into worms when killed, like Michael Arrington.



The green stuff is exploded toads.



Electrocute: best spell.



Zombie dogs make aggressive pets.

a 90-minute playthrough of this early chapter. Since your gold carries over to new characters, you've only got to try a few classes before you can easily afford the best items an early level character can use. These make combat trivially easy, so the auction house becomes a temptress, taunting you with powers that spoil the fun of the game.

It also puts your own finds in unwelcome perspective. For instance, that awesome Frost Wand you found after hours of play seems considerably less special when you see people are selling the same thing with three times the damage in the auction house. Buy that wand and the game becomes too easy; stick with yours and it's hard to get too excited about it.

Despite all that, even this short taste of *Diablo III* is more excitement than pain. The classes and their ridiculous rosters of skills are compelling to the point of obsession. Even by level 10, the particular build of a class you've settled on will be different to almost anyone else's. You have access to ten skills but only three

slots to put them in, so which of those 120 possible combinations you pick defines you entirely.

Later, of course, you can put any of 25 skills in six slots, and each of them can be modified into entirely new abilities with five different runestones – which gives you just over three trillion possibilities, by my count.

Alt+Tabbing frantically between the beta and the skill calculator on the game's official site fills the gamer's brain with nerdy and wonderful plans. I'm going to runestone my blowdart for a 37% chance of firing snakes. I'm going to turn my pet crow into a gold-fetching ferret. I'm going to change my Weapon Throw skill into one that throws an enemy corpse so hard that it explodes. And as much fun as I've had turning enemies into chickens, I can't wait to change that skill so it turns *me* into one.

The description of that particular tweak doesn't explain why this is advantageous, but when it's on a skill named Angry Chicken, that's hardly the point. ■

Tom Francis

Release JAN 2012

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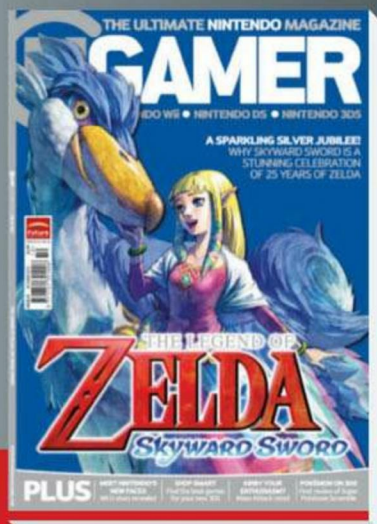
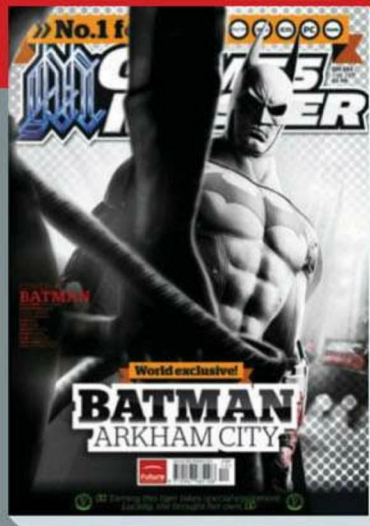


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MARS ATTACK



“We’re an FPS first,
and we’re always
striving to be the best
possible FPS we can be”

SIVVE

We size up **PLANETSIDE 2**, the MMOFPS that makes *Battlefield* look like a playground scuffle.
By Martin Davies

PlanetSide 2 has really nice clouds. As they bubble up over the rust red mesas of the Indra continent they occlude the sun, casting undulating shadows in realtime and leaking ghostly, shimmering rays. If you care to hop into an aircraft and point your nose up, you can lose yourself in the fogbank – which may be

a hazard or a blessing depending on who’s chasing you.

All this may seem like a minor frill for a game that otherwise sells itself on big gun battles, but it goes to the core of PlanetSide 2’s remit, and spells out its vital difference from other claimants to the MMOFPS title, such as *Dust 514*. As creative director Matt Higby puts it, “We’re not just building a shooter, we’re building a world.”

**RELEASE
2012**

Not everyone's cut out for command – so you can 'unfollow' tweets like Twitter accounts.



This would sound like puff if it weren't true. Like the original game, *PlanetSide 2* is set on an open world of sprawling, diverse continents. This is the planet Auraxis, contested by the game's three violently opposed factions. And that planet is there for more than just scene-setting – it's as much a weapon as any sidearm. The terrain may look fresh from Mother Nature's oven, but it's been attentively tweaked to break lines of sight, to allow for cover and clever tactics.

"One of our largest development efforts on this project has been hand crafting every single area of those eight-by-eight kilometre continents," Matt tells me. "To make sure that everywhere you're playing, from a wilderness area to a really dense facility area, all feel like they're custom created to support gameplay. And different types of gameplay: if I'm out in that wilderness area, depending on the availability of cover, the type of terrain, then it might be a field day for air vehicles, somewhere air vehicles can shine. But if there's a lot of cover, a lot of places where infantry can pop out and fire a rocket, then suddenly it becomes a little bit more balanced."

With a full day-night cycle, new strategies emerge: as the Terran Republic mass to deliver a 200-man hammerblow to a Vanu Sovereignty



facility, they might scale an escarpment under cover of dark, flashlights off to give as little sign of their presence as possible. Then, as the rosy fingers of dawn stretch over the hillside to their backs, the soldiers follow the light washing down upon dazzled Vanu guards. Nor is this some canned *Call of Duty* skirmish, exactly recycled with every victory – the target has been selected as part of a global strategy, hundreds upon hundreds of players self-organising to determine the time and angle of attack. Squad leaders pinpoint immediate objectives, focusing fire on a troublesome turret or rushing the barrier shield generator to allow aerial bombardment, while dedicated tank guilds roll in to breach the Vanu strongpoint's courtyard. A spec'd up Galaxy dropship acts as a mobile spawn point, spewing out reinforcements as allied Mosquitoes zip and weave in the skies, dogfighting with the defenders' Scythes.

The Vanu commanders will be hurriedly reacting to the assault, too, highlighting the battlezone as a high priority mission for all of their faction-mates to see, manoeuvring and plotting, interpreting the repercussions of their loss or victory in the context of an ever-changing frontline. Since capture-time on an objective is based on the amount of peripheral real-estate

that is claimed by your faction, real battlefield strategy emerges: pincer movements and encirclements become important ways to shore up a major assault and deny the enemy an easy recapture. The choice of targets may be influenced by the resources they contain. A plentiful supply of metal, nanites, or auraxium enables factions to deploy upgrades, their function varying for each of the three empires.

Denial is as important as acquisition, Matt tells me. "If the Vanu is attacking you and they have railguns on their

"This isn't some *Call of Duty* skirmish, endlessly recycled"

mag riders, and they are fucking you up, then you know you need to capture auraxium and deplete their reserves."

But as a mere grunt, that high-level strategy is another's concern – on the ground you are one gun among hundreds, crashing against the walls of a vast facility whose three courtyards are themselves each the size of a *Modern Warfare* multiplayer level. Energy beams lance out from the defenders and rocketry spirals after targets through the still-dark sky, leaving a trail of smoke that sears bright in the HDR glow of the rising sun.



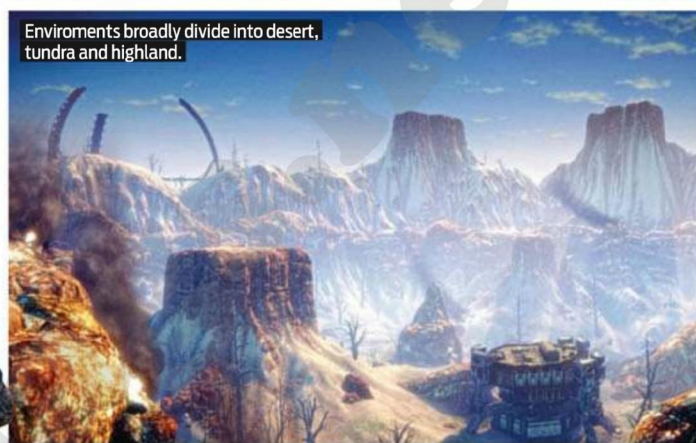
"Ha, they'll never find me down here."



Even muzzle-flash is configurable.



Light assault troops get jetpacks. Boing!



Enviroments broadly divide into desert, tundra and highland.

PlanetSide 2 does big and it does beautiful. To some extent it has to in order to overcome the dual stigma of being both an MMO and a free-to-play game, neither of which are famed for their glitzy production qualities.

"For me it's all about seeing the game as an FPS – and that's it," says senior art director Tramell 'T.Ray' Isaac. "When we were working on [cancelled SOE game] *The Agency*, one of the comments we got a lot was, 'It looks pretty good for an MMO.' And that 'for an MMO' should not even be in the equation for me. People should look at it and see that it's got the same level of quality as every other FPS on the market."

PlanetSide 2 succeeds on that account, and then some – but does it play like an FPS, too? The old *PlanetSide*'s combat was muddled by unseen dice-rolls, not to mention creaking on 2003's hardware specs and squeaking awkwardly through the internet's tiny, tiny pipes. Not so now, says Matt. Not only has technology caught up with the original game's forward-thinking vision, but the devs have a keener idea of what makes a satisfying run-and-gun experience. Bullets go pretty much where you fire them and the guns are not only lethal but feel it, too.

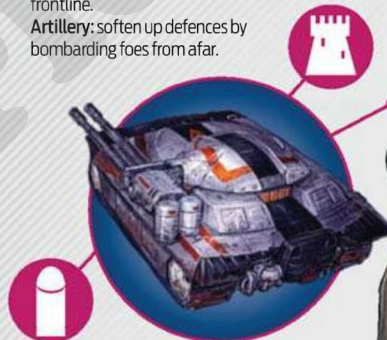
"The impact of weapons needs to be felt not just by the guy getting shot ▶

SPEC OPS Some of the many ways you can specialise your skills

Armour

Siege: punch straight through the enemy's frontline.

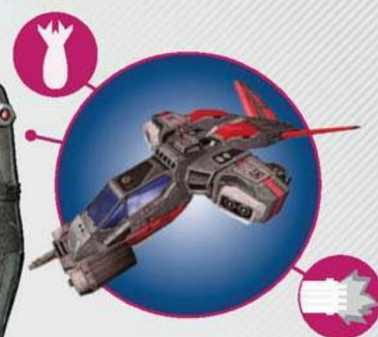
Artillery: soften up defences by bombarding foes from afar.



Air

Fighters: get your Biggles on in deadly dogfights.

Bombers: strafe enemy infantry and ground vehicles.



Infantry

Sniper: plug fools who step into your scope

Recon: cloak up, backstab and sabotage



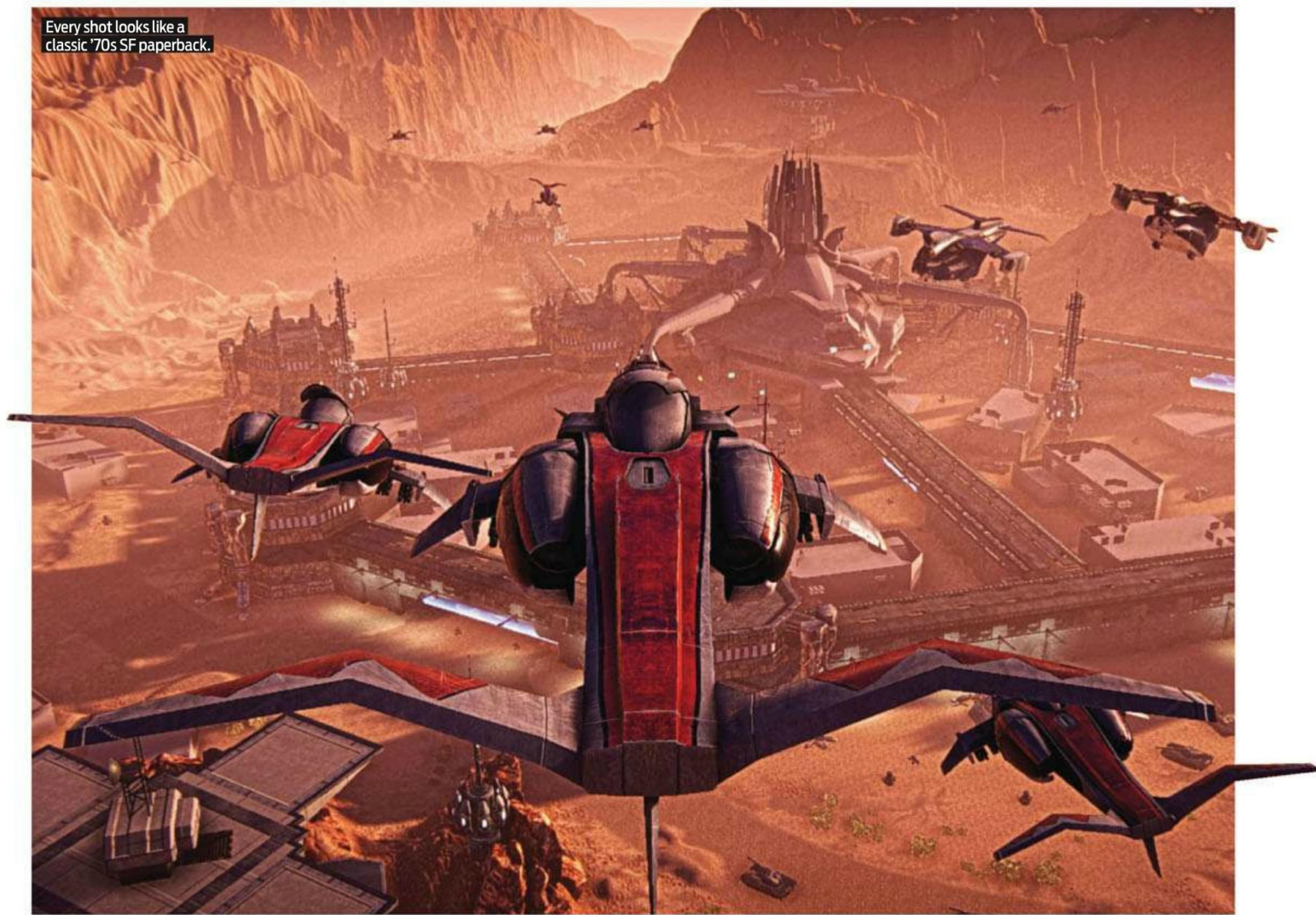
Command

Squad leader: set troops' moment-to-moment tactics

Guild leader: craft the specialties of a mighty platoon



Every shot looks like a classic '70s SF paperback.



but also by the guy who's doing the firing," Matt says. "I think that gets missed a lot. There's a lot that goes into it – audio, animation, ambient effects on the screen. In MMOs you don't usually spend a lot of time trying to think about what it feels to cast a spell in first-person – you look at the effect of the spell on the person who's getting

hit. But we're an FPS first, and we're always striving to be the best possible FPS we can be."

There's another hurdle: the game has to feel fair, despite the MMO-style character advancement and the customisation system for its six classes, along with their many weapons and vehicles. Not to mention the distinct

"You can put an anti-infantry weapon on one arm and an anti-vehicle one on the other"

tactical and strategic difference enforced by your choice of faction. It's one hell of a balancing act, but Matt's keen that new or non-paying players never feel they are outclassed in battle by the equipment of their veteran foes. You don't pay for power in *PlanetSide 2*. Microtransaction upgrades simply re-specialise your class, or unlock different combat options, all of which are available through playing the game and queuing up skills to be trained passively over time: much as players already do in *EVE Online*.

"You can really spec out in different ways," Matt says. "You can spec out the Infiltrator class to be a really sneaky gadgety, sabotage-focused guy, and bring a bunch of C4 and motion detectors and sneak behind enemy lines, stab people and blow up their tanks. Or you could spec him to be a dedicated wilderness sniper character."

"We have six different infantry classes," Matt continues, as he uses a debug command to unlock the camera, swooping in on character models to show the astonishing, and quite possibly needless, level of detail.

EMPIRE OF THE GUN *PlanetSide's* three factions

Vanu Sovereignty

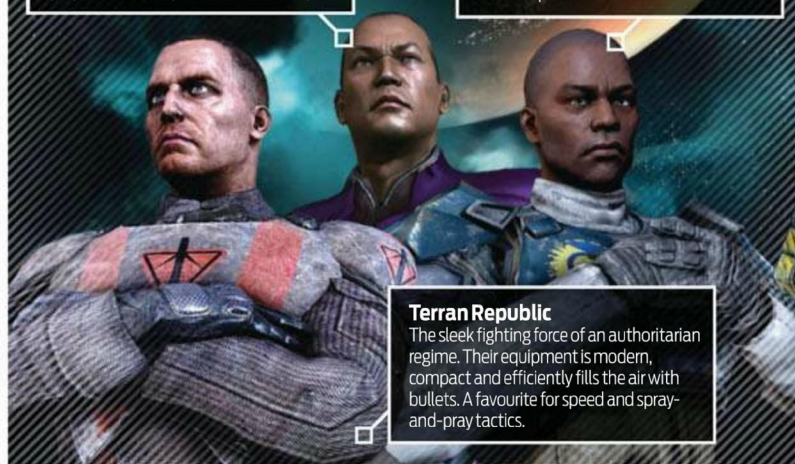
Armoured in an oily purple carapace of alien design. Their energy weapons reduce recoil and defy bullet drop, but the projected balls of plasma travel slowly.

New Conglomerate

Freedom fighters or terrorists depending on who you talk to. Their equipment has a chunky, industrial look to it. They hit heavily but can spare few bullets.

Terran Republic

The sleek fighting force of an authoritarian regime. Their equipment is modern, compact and efficiently fills the air with bullets. A favourite for speed and spray-and-pray tactics.

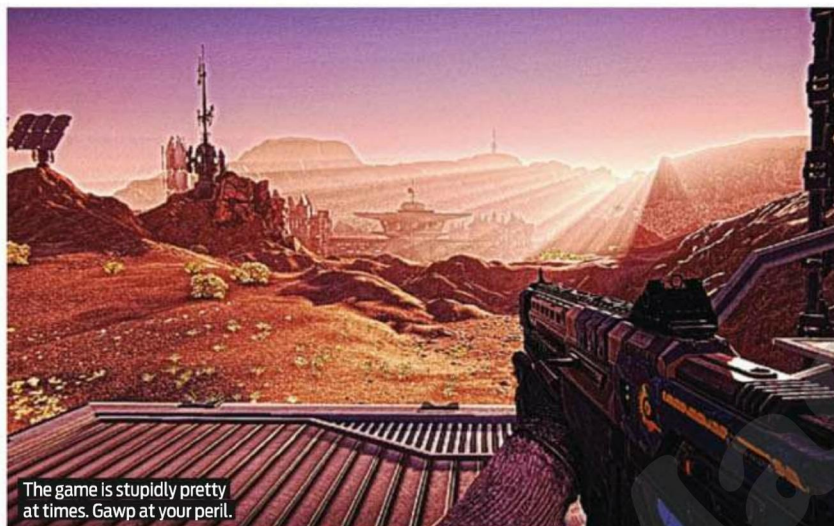




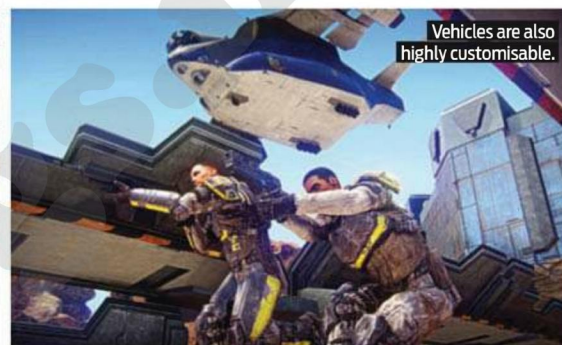
This hardly seems sporting.



Skills include the ability to respawn by your leader.



The game is stupidly pretty at times. Gasp at your peril.



Vehicles are also highly customisable.

"Light assault is basically the 'glass cannon' character. He can do the most damage the quickest. He's very agile, but it's also very vulnerable. Because he can get to places very quickly, he can overextend himself very easily and if he doesn't have support backing him up he can get crushed." Matt moves the camera along. "This is our engineer. He can place barriers and gun turrets, and repair vehicles. But he can do a lot of offensive stuff on top of that. Our gun turrets aren't automated, they require a player to actually man them. And then the engineer can go throw mines down and destroy vehicles.

"Our heavy assault character again has a dualistic role: he can either be very much an anti-infantry character or very much an anti-vehicle character. You can go play a medic and not really focus on being a combatant, but medics can be very much an in-your-face infantry fighter, too. MAX [mech-suited soldiers] are definitely making a comeback. Unlike *PlanetSide 1* where there was a specific MAX for each role, our MAX is configurable, so that you can put an anti-infantry weapon on one arm and an anti-vehicle weapon on another arm. Like everything else we're allowing for a really wide range of customisation with each one of these classes."

You're never class-locked in

PlanetSide 2, either. Equipment terminals let you leap instantly into another class's skin, and then there are the vehicles too, which the devs essentially treat as extra classes. They're just as customisable: a Mosquito can be loaded-out for aerial combat, or air-to-ground as the situation demands.

Some of this customisation comes from the equipment and weaponry – guns are modular and nearly every bit can be swapped out and replaced, altering the weapon's range, rate of fire, sound, scope, capacity, or even the shape of its muzzle flash, while rebalancing other variables to ensure no all-round advantage. But a lot of a player's abilities also come from skills they can train or buy – certificates to use vehicles and aircraft are an obvious one, but there are also more subtle boons: an ability to allow players to spawn on you as squad leader, or inside your dropship. Every compartment of the game has its own skill-tree, it seems, from pilots to squad leaders, commanders and the factions themselves.

The scale of the world, and the battles in it, is breathtaking enough. But the challenge of balancing the complex weave of variables, and fitting it all into a robust MMO social framework, is as colossal a task as you

are likely to see in game development. This could be why there aren't that many open-world MMOFPS knocking about. The reason that SOE have done it, and no one else, comes down to the gradual accumulation of tech and expertise over the eight years since *PlanetSide 1*. During that time they've developed and iterated upon Forge Light – a suite of backend magic that not only spits out *PlanetSide 2*'s dizzying landscapes and player numbers, but also holds together the servers and communication infrastructure of the game.

Despite this technology on hand, *PlanetSide 2* remains a huge undertaking, but one that SOE hope will be pay off over many years – after all, *PlanetSide 1*'s servers still ring to the sound of gunfire today, nearly a decade after release. The developers have a huge number of features they plan to add to the game, post-release, from the ability for players to drop and construct their own bases, to the addition of AI wildlife, or possibly an AI faction. All of which will be decided with a good deal of consultation with the players themselves. For all its stunning draw distances and vast landscapes swarming with legion after legion of soldiers, *PlanetSide 2* isn't just about a being a big game, it's all about the long game too. ■



RETURN of the MAX

RELEASE
MAR 12

Eight years after his fall, the gravelliest, grimmest hero ever to grace a PC returns in **MAX PAYNE 3**. By Craig Pearson

Mull this over: it's been eight years since we last saw Max rip a raw, bloody wound through the New York criminal underbelly. Eight years. That is *old* (staff writer Rich was 17 when *Max Payne 2* came

out). But no one has managed to take his place. *Kane & Lynch* tried, and they're still trying, but for grumpy, hyperviolent third-person action, we really need some more *Max*.

Despite a new haircut and the sunnier setting of Sao Paulo, as I'm shown the new game in Rockstar's offices it's clear they're sticking to the well-worn path that *Max* sourly trod before. In fact, we're in New York. Brazil does feature a lot, but this wouldn't be the same game without a dingy, Big Apple corridor to tear up.

It starts in Max's apartment, where he's under siege from a mob family. Max has killed the boss's son. It's the

incident that'll send him to Brazil, fleeing from the rage of the mafiosi. Rockstar have done a remarkable job of impersonating the original developers Remedy: when Max runs out into the corridor blasting at the mob guys and drops into bullet-time, everything feels spot on. The world thickens as the trenchcoated ex-cop fires his gleaming handcannons. I can pick out individual bullets leaving the gun. The guy at the end of the corridor folds. The sniper rifle laser sights coming in through the window are easily dodgeable as time takes a break.

Coming out of bullet-time, the noise and bodies play catch-up, and everything rushes into place with a chaotic whoosh that's as satisfying as the violence. Glass tinkles as the snipers' bullets play across the corridors: Max dives into bullet-time and aims at the opposite roof, peppering the snipers. As he hits the ground, the camera zooms to ▶ his





This is why we won't join our local Neighbourhood Watch.



Max channels the 'John McClane from Die Hard' look.



The bus depot offers lots of windows to smash.



Explodable stationery really adds pizzazz to office shootouts.

target's face, tracing the bullet. A short cutscene plays – a crazed ex-military neighbour of Max's runs into the corridor with a shotgun and takes out a few mobsters, before detonating a bomb vest. Inside, his apartment is littered with conspiracy paraphernalia and bomb-making equipment. It has nothing to do with the main story, but those surreal little pockets of madness fit into Max's strange dream-like noir world perfectly.

World traveller

The story bounces between New York and Brazil. Fleeing NY, Max ends up working for the Brancos, a wealthy Brazilian family, as a security chief for hire. Their money makes them a target for the paramilitary group Cracha Preto. They've already kidnapped the trophy wife of the family's boss, Rodrigo Branco.

Max goes through some major image changes on his trip; the shaven-headed, wife-beater-vest look is the final stage in his transformation. It's a 'fuck you, shit's about to get real' to the people he's fighting. Before that, though, he's rocking a cheap, crumpled grey suit, while protecting the family from strangely well-equipped invaders.

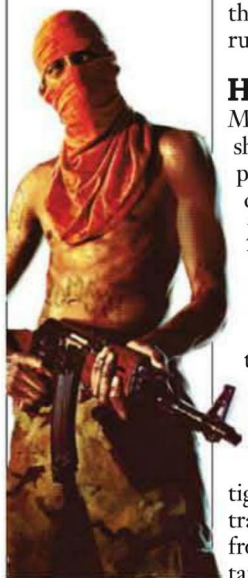
The bad guys rappel into Branco's HQ while Max is escorting an IT guy to the server room, but the NPC isn't a

"The NPC isn't a burden: he keeps away from the fight and opens doors. That's his contribution"

burden: he keeps away from the fight and opens doors when asked. That's his contribution. The open-plan office is a perfect place to show off the new cover mechanics. Max sticks to the walls, and ducks under waist-sized desks. He can blind-fire over and around the edge of cover. It's a concession to stealth, but there's a lot more fun to be had just running around and gunning.

Hotdesking is cool

Modern offices are good places for shootouts: everything explodes in papery, glassy blasts under Max's double-Uzi onslaught. There's just enough cover to take people unawares, and Max now has a disarm move that spams a few punches at a nearby enemy before yanking whatever weapon they've got out of their grip. There's plenty of opportunity to upgrade weaponry from a warm grasp – or cold, dead hands. While Rockstar are known for their open worlds, this is a tightly choreographed bolt. The bullet trail camera, which follows the killshot from the barrel of your gun to the target, kicks in when Max fires at an



enemy standing in front of a glass window. He spins backwards out of the window, the camera following his final moments in a haze of blood and broken glass. It's a nice reward for the player, and it doubles as a way of telling you that you've just shot the last bad guy of the section.

Further on, after Max has a battle with a heavily armoured minigun boss who requires nothing but bullet spam to put down, the office explodes. As offices tend to do, when around Max.

Stumbling through the ruins of the building, Max has collapsing floors and flames to contend with. But even when he's limping, concussed and slightly on fire, he still has to shoot people. Max battles his way through the flames; no wonder he's grumpy.

The game is punctuated with cinematic moments: tiny instances of obligatory bullet-time, a few per level, such as the warehouse sequence I'm shown. The level floods with enemies and you're given a few seconds of unlimited ammo. Max leaps from a balcony to a hook, and dangles from it, before slow-motion kicks in and he's swinging, shooting everyone in a few seconds. The warehouse is part of a bus depot, which is where Max has to lead Giovanna, a girlfriend, to safety – and again it looks like Rockstar have got it right: there's no mollycoddling a dim

Why settle for one gun when you can have two?



AI here. She only gets in trouble when the story demands it.

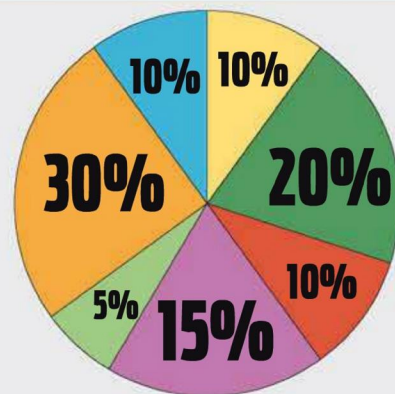
Explosions rock

There's a lot of environmental detail in the bus depot. Nearby, a petrol station explosion results in an impressive blast that destroys a bus and launches enemies through the air. Other points of interest include a gunfight in the station garage that ends with Max shooting the control panel on a massive platform, dropping the bus that's resting on it onto the heads of the enemies who were using it for cover. Later, Max uses his bullets to aid a loose balcony on its way to collapse.

It all looks lovely in slow motion. It was never enough for *Max Payne* to look slick: it had to feel awesome as well. Rockstar have expanded the Woo-some action a little, allowing Max to land after a dive and to continue firing in a 360° arc from the ground. It's a nice touch, further empowering the player to shoot whoever you like while lying on your back.

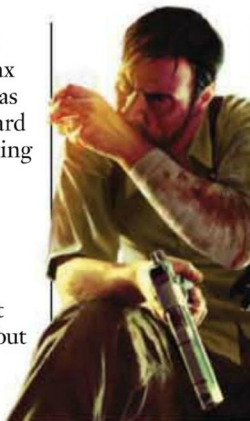
But laid back it's not. When Max and Giovanna have to commandeer a bus to make their escape, the inevitable happens: an on-rails shooting section. Yet, as with the NPC escorting, it looks like Rockstar have neatly side-stepped the usual pitfalls. It's short and it's explosive. Giovanna drives while Max

CHARTING HIS PAYNE There are some good reasons for Max's misery



leans out of the open front door and unleashes his Uzi. Even in a bus, Max can use bullet-time to pick out the gas pumps, although the constant forward progression tends to leave the resulting plume of flame somewhere in your peripheral vision. The demonstration ends with the bus crashing and a fitting fade to black.

Truth be told, the action hasn't moved on that much in the dormant years. The NPCs are a bit smarter, but this is the sort of stuff that Remedy delivered nearly a decade ago, just with some spit and polish, and



extra action moments underpinning the classic manshoots. The gravely narration remains and the story is still delivered through graphic novel-style cutscenes, although now they take scenes from the game and force them into each panel.

In fact, the only concession to what we expect from a modern game is in the hidden multiplayer that Rockstar have confirmed but are refusing to talk about. In pretty much every other aspect, *Max Payne 3* has refused to move with the times. It's absolutely the old Max in new clothing. ■



BLUE SKY THINKING

We talk to Ken Levine about **BIOSHOCK INFINITE**'s new breed of storytelling. *By Tom Francis*

B*ioShock Infinite* is a first-person shooter like its predecessors, but a less lonely one. You play Booker DeWitt, who is trying to escape the flying city of Columbia with a girl named Elizabeth before a terrifying steampunk robot called Songbird catches her. The city is a spectacular airborne flotilla of districts suspended by vast balloons – a testament to America's cultural might, and its fondness for things that are big but not terribly useful.

Our last good look at the game was a spectacular 15-minute demonstration at E3, which you can watch here: bit.ly/InfiniteE3Demo.

I spoke to creative director Ken Levine about why Elizabeth is the centrepiece not just of the story, but of the technology that drives it.

Your personal story seems to be about rescuing Elizabeth from

Songbird. How does that tie in to the revolution that's going on in the world around you?

Elizabeth is the catalyst for what sets this revolution that's going in slow motion into one that's going at hyper-speed. The fact that you bust her out of this tower where you find her at the beginning of the game... the Queen comes into play on the board.

And each side – the Founders on one side, and the Vox Populi on the other side – feels that Elizabeth is essential to them accomplishing their goals. The Founders want to keep her locked up in the tower, and the Vox Populi want to destroy her. This is because she is part of a prophecy: it is believed that if Elizabeth dies, the city falls with her.

That's all the Vox Populi want, to take the symbol of their oppressor and make it tumble from the heavens.

Aren't they also on the city, though?

Yeah, they are, but you know what? They don't care.



He looks like your granddad, but that's not a driving glove he's wearing...



That steampunk circus strongman suit is unbelievably cool.



Founders leader Zachary Hale Comstock isn't everybody's choice.

“The Founders want Elizabeth locked up in the tower, and the Vox Populi just want to destroy her”

So it's like suicide bombing on a massive scale?

Yeah. Well, if you go back to the Anarchist movements of that period, their symbol was a bomb. They have to tear down the system to rebuild it.

How do you go about making the player care about a companion character like Elizabeth?

In terms of emotional connection, I thought about this for a long time. Because you only know this character for a period of hours, and you have to make a connection with her. And in real life that just doesn't happen—relationships take a long time to form.

So I spent a lot of time thinking about that: “How can you make a relationship form quickly? How do you cement a relationship fast?”

And one of the things that we kept coming back to was soldiers—the kinds of bonds that soldiers form, when their lives are in danger and they make these incredible sacrifices for each other. And I think that it is sacrifice that makes people form relationships very, very quickly,

with people that you don't really know very well.

And so I just started thinking about how we can make Elizabeth and Booker perform sacrifices for each other, and how that would draw them together. And that's what we did with the narrative of the demo we showed at E3: a little microcosm of that.

It's basically a story of sacrifice, and she sets up her own stakes: this is the thing she wants out of life, and this is what she wants least out of life—to go back with this... thing, Songbird.

And what does she do at the end of the demo? She goes back. And then that puts Booker in a situation where the onus is on him. She made the sacrifice for him, what does he have to do for her?

It's one thing to say that the princess is in another castle, it's another thing to say that she's there because of *you*. And not you as in the backstory, but you as in what happened in the game.

How much work does it take to produce a demo like the E3 one?

For us it's a lot of work, and the reason it's challenging is that obviously you're bringing things to a level of polish ahead of the rest of the game. But the thing for us that's useful, that

actually saves us time, is that it forces us to get real, you know? We can't say, “Oh, that'll be fine once that part's in,” or “Yeah, don't worry about that.”

It sort of forces us to bring it to a point where it actually has to stand up for itself. These Skylines, it's not, “They'll look good,” or “They're going to feel fine.” It's, “*Do* they look okay? Do they feel okay? Do they seem interesting? Do they seem fun?” We have to make those determinations.

Like interacting with Elizabeth: “Well, yeah it'll be great! Trust me!” We actually have to bring it to a point where we start to get a sense of that, internally on the team, and I think that's very valuable for us.

So it's almost like a preview for you—you're finding out what your game's going to be like and how it works.

Absolutely. So quite often you'll encounter things that you realise are not going to work, and you have to either figure out how to make them work, or say they're not going to be part of the game. And that happens a lot during our demos.

There are moments in the demo that seem scripted, and others where it seems like you could go anywhere. Can you?





Irrational mined early 20th century war propaganda for Columbia's political art.



Levine says *Infinite's* dystopian vision is part *Blue Velvet*, part *The Shining*.



"I wonder if they accept Orange Wednesdays tickets here?"



"I wouldn't have to kick you in the stomach if you flossed more often."



Tears in the fabric of space-time bring anachronistic elements to 1912 Columbia.

Well, I'd say it's much like *BioShock*. It's just that the levels are geometrically larger, and they seem more vertical. But I don't want to give an impression that this is a *Grand Theft Auto* or a *Red Dead* game.

I think the big thing that is interesting for us in this is that... we controlled that demo, but if we want Elizabeth to do a bit of business – like the part where she picks up the Abraham Lincoln head – what if the player doesn't go there? What if the player's busy? What if they're in combat at the time?

And so we have this system where we build these bits of business like the Lincoln head, and Elizabeth says to the game: "Hey, I'd like to pick up the Lincoln head now and show it to the player, can I do that?" And the game either says, "Yes, this is a good time," or, "No." And if the game says no, we'll place the other opportunity somewhere else in the level for her to do that bit of business and again, it'll check: "Hey, is this a good time?"

Does that mean she'll carry the Lincoln head through the whole level, waiting for you to turn around?

No, it means that we would place the Lincoln head in the level, but say she picks up the Lincoln Head and all of a

sudden the player gets attacked, she has to get rid of it. So we need to account for that, or she's carrying this stupid Lincoln head throughout the level.

But we also have another system on top of that which is saying, "We don't want all these bits of business to either happen at the very beginning or the very end of the level, as if the player is sort of rushing them to the end." [It] works like content distribution, saying, "Has Elizabeth just done something recently, or has she not done something for a while? We should try to make her do something now."

So, those bits – you could say that they're scripted in a sense, but they could happen at numerous places throughout the level, because we don't know what the player's going to do. So we have to account for it, and Elizabeth has to seem both fluid and consistent.

That is probably the most complicated thing – in fact, I wouldn't say probably, I'd say it *is* the most complicated thing in the game, because she's so content-heavy.

She has her roots in the Big Daddy and Little Sister characters in some ways. And I say that in terms of how we had to think about it, because Big Daddy was trying to go through all

these little bits of business as well: Little Sister would get tired, and Big Daddy would control the speed he was moving at. And we had to do that in places where we didn't know what players were going to be doing. Their paths weren't entirely predetermined, nor were their actions on that path entirely predetermined. So she's just like an incredibly, incredibly complicated version of that.

I don't think anybody's done anything exactly quite like this, because she's performing these continually scripted things in areas where we can't control the action.

Were you tempted to put that in a restrictive context, where the player loses control of his view and has to see Elizabeth do this cool thing?

We have this theory – and I can't say whether it makes sense, but... the less we take control away from the player, the better. That's always been our structure in terms of storytelling, it's always been our approach back from *System Shock 2* to *BioShock*. We try to tell a story that is deep in narrative, but without asking the player to be restricted for it – and that's very tough to do. But we think it's worth it. ■ **BioShock Infinite is out in 2012.**





EXPLOITING MINERS

Getting rich quick in the free MMO **RUNESCAPE** only took time, a little coal, and the shattered dreams of children everywhere. *By Matt Lees*

“

What are you doing, Matt?” asked my friend. It

was March 2002 and he had spotted me through the window of our college computer room. Why wasn’t I in the pub with the rest of our friends? I explained that I was playing a free fantasy MMO called *Runescape*. Technically, that was true. It was certainly true enough to suffice as an answer for now.

“Oh. Right.” He was clearly unimpressed by the low-resolution 3D blobs trundling around the screen. “Is it to do with killing dragons and goblins?”

“Yes,” I lied. “It’s just a bit of fun.”

I wasn’t happy that my new friends at college thought I was spending all my free time killing waves of magical monsters, but it was better than the truth. The truth was that, driven by impatience and greed, I had found myself running a coal mining business fuelled by child labour.

In my defence, I didn’t intend for it to end up this way. I don’t think anyone living in rural Cheshire ever really *intends* to get into child exploitation. I never really planned to start buying Rage Against the Machine albums, and I wouldn’t recommend that either.

None of what I achieved back then could be carried out today, anyway. In 2007, *Runescape*’s developers introduced the Grand Exchange, a marketplace in which players are able to easily buy and sell their goods for fair and reasonable prices. Back in 2002, though, *Runescape* was a wild new world. Outside of the game’s NPC shops, buying and selling items usually relied on players simply

standing on the streets for hours at a time, shouting their best offers at anyone who’d listen. It was a world ripe with opportunity for deceit.

I wasn’t always a manipulative git. My earliest obsession with *Runescape* was driven by a confused fascination. My younger brother had started playing shortly after the game first went online in 2001, and initially I was happy to watch over his shoulder as he mindlessly potted around this strange and muddy world of unappealing shapes and colours.

Most of his exploration revolved around an area known as ‘the Wilderness’, an anything-goes PvP zone that was especially deadly for low-level players unaware of the dangers. My brother explained that if you were quick, you could nip across the border and grab bits of unwanted loot from the corpse of the winner’s victim. The trinkets were cheap, but he seemed to enjoy playing the part of a professional culture.

Life of pie

Mostly though, he’d be in the windmill. “I’m making pies,” he said, picking up two freshly spawned tins from the kitchen floor.

“You collect grain from outside, then grind it in the mill to make flour,” he explained. “Then you get clay to make a jug, and fill it with water to turn the flour into pastry. You put that into the tin with some berries or meat, then it goes in the oven and you sometimes get a *good* pie.” This specific distinction explained the abandoned black discs that covered the kitchen floor, and why none of the other players seemed interested in scavenging them.

Part of me knew I should stay away, but there was something strangely compelling about an MMO that wouldn’t give you the ability to make a pie until you’d burnt about 15 of the bastards. In February of 2002, my character Magicpants was born.

At first, Magicpants just wanted to be a warrior. After hours of

“I was going to become a *Runescape* master. I had an intellectual edge, my social skills were better, and I didn't have to be in bed by nine. I was going to be rich.”

constant battle, he learned the true cost of warfare: fruity pies. Healing up naturally took ages, so it was always best to stock up on tasty cakes before dashing into the field. Pies were expensive to buy though, so most of the world's bravest warriors would run out in to the Wilderness, fight for a while, and then retire to the kitchen to master the art of pastry. It was odd. The elves in *The Lord of the Rings* might have had a penchant for magical chunks of bread, but you can hardly imagine Legolas nipping off to make a cheeky Bakewell tart. After seeing the carbon-coated carpet of the windmill's kitchen, I decided I'd be better off risking death.

Unfortunately, this meant that I often found myself biting off more than I could chew. Fights were tough, and weren't made any easier by a zoomed-in interface that made it almost impossible to move and talk at the same time. To compensate, players would boil down messages to impenetrable acronyms that, even now, make very little sense. Sporadic bursts of movement paired with exclamations of “HH” usually translated as: “Oh God, help me! I'm being killed by a goblin!” Few players ever worked out these cries, causing me to fall again and again to depressingly avoidable deaths.

After one too many, I realised why so few people in the game seemed capable of social interaction.

Runescape was slow, ugly, and idiosyncratic. On the other hand, it

was free to play, and would run on almost any computer without an installation. These two points alone made it the perfect choice for anyone who lacked money, power, or admin access to their computer. *Runescape* was a game designed for children. In many regards, it still is.

This was the point at which I should have logged off. I didn't. I couldn't resist the opportunity. All good MMOs tease the potential for grand social status, but this golden goose was too juicy to neglect. Given time, dedication and careful planning, I could easily become a *Runescape* master. I had an intellectual edge, my social skills were better, and I didn't have to be in bed by nine. I was going to be rich.

Digging in

My ambitions had an endgame to begin with: I wanted a suit of mithril armour. But that didn't take long, and it didn't end there. In just over a month, I was the 63rd best *Runescape* miner in the world.

Mining appealed to me initially because it was so simple: wait till the ore reappears within a rock, then use your pickaxe to collect the goodies. Filling your inventory with 27 lumps of ore was easy enough, but the overwhelming demand would tend to slow things down. With more than one person trying to farm the same rock, mining could quickly become utterly infuriating.

In the early days of mining bronze and iron, I would happily wait until

the person in front of me had finished, but my patience quickly faded once I realised the money I could make by spending more time creating items at the furnace. Before my smithing skill hit level 30, I had been able to easily crank out iron bars at a regular rate. Now that I had stepped up to smelting steel, however, there was an additional ingredient required: two lumps of coal. I could personally collect the iron ore needed, but if I was going to maintain my previous momentum I'd need help with the rest.

“Hello JomboJames. Would you be interested in selling me some coal?”

JomboJames stopped mining, and slowly walked towards me. There were a few seconds of silence as he typed out his first response: “WUT”. Persisting, I explained that I was interested in buying his coal. These days you'll be lucky to get a piece of coal for less than 250 gold, but my offer back then was a meagre 50g for 10 lumps. After another few moments of weighing the deal up, he came to his final decision: “OLK BRB DINNER IS READ.”

Once Jombo's dinner was no longer read, he met me by the bank. Over the days that followed, he proved to be an invaluable employee – delivering around 20 pieces of coal a day when he wasn't busy doing his homework or being sent to bed early.

At this rate though, progress was still slow. Smelting ore was practically automatic – you simply found a furnace then chose how many metal bars you wanted to make. Consequently, I had lots of extra time on my hands. I decided it was time to expand my operation.

It had turned out that Jombo had a couple of friends who were also looking to earn some shiny fictional coins, and who would all meet me at the bank south of Varrock once a day to turn in their goods.

In retrospect, there was clearly a

HOW RUNESCAPE GREW UP



JAN 4 2001 RUNESCAPE LAUNCHES

Two brothers, Paul and Andrew Gower, launch the open beta of their new online game, *Runescape*. 30 players log on during the first 24 hours, stepping into a map just a fraction of the size it is today.

DEC 1 2001 JAGEX IS BORN

After enlisting the business knowhow of a man genuinely called Constant Tedder, the brothers transformed their previously lo-fi endeavours into an actual registered company called Jagex Ltd. By 2002, they'd need an office.

FEB 27 2002 SUBSCRIPTION FEES

Struggling to bring in enough revenue from banner advertising, Jagex began offering a selection of tasty extras to players willing to pay for premium membership. Within a week, *Runescape* had 3,000 subscribers.

MAR 29 2004 RUNESCAPE 2.0

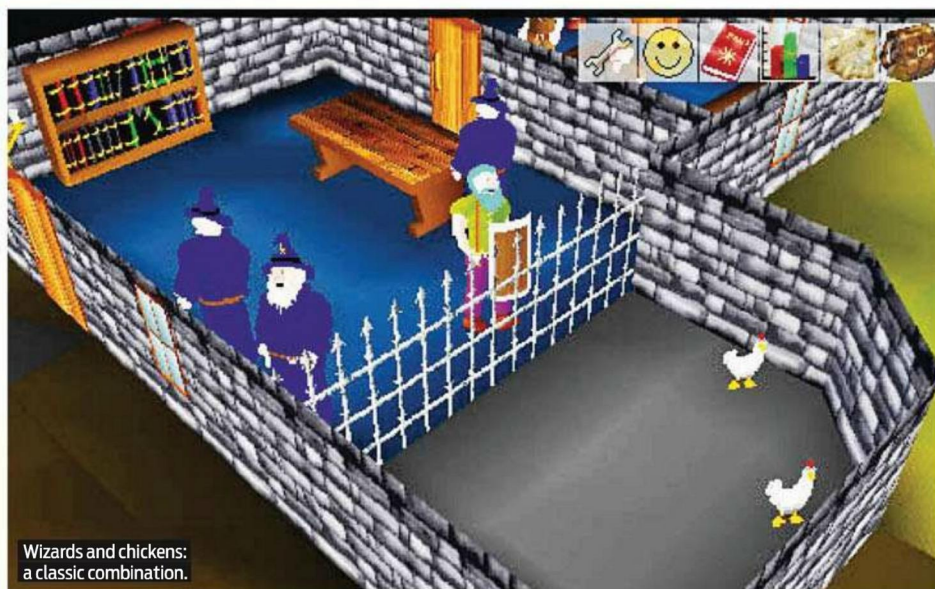
The first major revamp of the game goes live, with the previous version now being known as 'Runescape Classic'. Predictably, a lot of people complained that the changes had ruined the game.

JUNE 14 2004 MODERATION

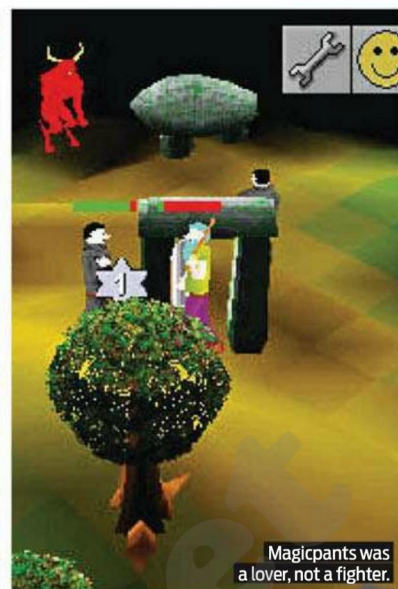
Initially testing out the service with a few of their personal friends, Jagex later rolled out a comprehensive set of tools which allowed *Runescape* players to act as moderators. Power to the people.

MAR 15 2006 DING!

Runescape officially launches the optimistically titled 'Recipe for Disaster' – a meaty mini-adventure that brings the game's total number of completable quests up to a grand total of 100.



Wizards and chickens: a classic combination.



Magipants was a lover, not a fighter.



The wool mining industry never took off.



I usually pay kids to fight scorpions for me.

strange kind of reverence involved. All three would travel together, and approach me one at time – with JomboJames always the first to complete his part of the transaction. I expect this might have had something to do with the fact that I'd once told Jombo I was 17 years old – a revelation that could cause anyone under the age of 10 to find themselves suddenly lost in a fog of awe.

I don't think I ever asked how old they all were, but none of them seemed to have been alive for long enough to master words or numbers – given that each was being ripped off on a daily basis by a man in pink trousers who really should know

better. "THANKS", they might say – departing once again to begin another pickaxe-pilgrimage. It was basically a lot like the Nativity, except that the three wise men weren't wise, or men, and delivered only triple coal.

King Coal

Jombo's crew were reliable, but they weren't my only suppliers. In under a week my influence had spread to three separate mining communities, with more than 20 different children contacting me on a daily basis to try to sell me the coal they'd been hoarding. I had suddenly become a coal baron, exploiting my workers with low prices, making trinkets and

"More than 20 children were contacting me on a daily basis to sell me coal. I was a coal baron"

selling them on at enormous profit. Like most war criminals, I don't remember the names and faces, only the time, the location and the profits.

Despite his weeks of loyalty, JomboJames was soon left behind by the swarm of children willing to bring my coal straight to the furnace at Al Kharid – an under-used smelting location which had now become my second home. After

MAY 31 2006 DIY TIME

Originally slated for release in 2001, this update finally gave paying members the opportunity to buy or build their own house within a personal instanced area.

MAY 8 2007 ACHIEVEMENTS

Encouraging players to try a variety of playing styles within the game, *Runescape* introduced the first in many waves of unlockable tasks. Originally called Achievements, these were later simply named 'tasks'.

AUG 6 2007 CLANCHAT

Pandering to the needs of the game's now massive user-base, the inclusion of a wider chat system made it much easier to find like-minded players to help you out. These days it's used for all sorts of inane banter.

DEC 10 2007 THE GRAND EXCHANGE

Runescape's opening of The Grand Exchange marks the first major effort to crack down on the game's problems with scamming: creating price regulations to protect and inform less experienced players.

JULY 14 2008 RUNESCAPE HD

Sprucing up the entire game with a healthy lick of 3D paint, this update substantially improved the game's still Java-powered graphics. The game is still a little bit uggers, to be honest.

AUGUST 28 2010 RUNEFEST

It might not have been on the scale of a Blizzard shindig, but Jagex's London-based meet gave the game's community a chance to meet the developers behind the game. Lovely.





Modern Runescape! It's got trees, and graphics!



This is where all the cool cats hang out. I'm lost.



I miss my pink trousers. 2011 is far too real.



Combat Training = how to click on a thing.

Getting Started in Runescape



1 Escape to Runescape

Head to Runescape.com and click the giant 'Play Now' button. It's powered by Java, so you'll need that installed, but you likely already do. It's easy, free, and if it ran on school computers ten years ago, it'll run on yours today.



2 Put yourself to task

Rather than clicking through masses of explanatory text, it's best to make use of the game's achievement-style Task system to get an idea of what you should be doing to start out. If you get stuck, keep your eyes out for a helpful chap called Roddeck.



3 Heed the warnings

It might seem *Runescape* is holding your hand a little more tightly than is comfortable, but it's worth taking the warnings seriously. Entering the Wilderness without experience under your belt is a surefire way to get yourself smushed by a PvP player who'll happily pinch most of your items in the process.



4 Finish The Blood Pact

The game's first quest is a great place to start. Speak to Xenia in the Lumbridge Graveyard to kick things off, and you'll soon get your hands on a selection of free weapons to take away and use. This quest has also got a dragon in it. Imagine that!



5 Kill some cows

The goblins near River Lum will be all you can handle to begin with, but it's worth bothering the bovines of Lumbridge as soon as you can. Dropping bones, cowhide, and raw beef, they're perfect for making quick cash in the game's early stages.



6 Don't get scammed

The majority of *Runescape*'s players are a decent bunch, but there are plenty of dodgy types looking for new and interesting ways to rob you blind. If a man tries to pay you pennies to mine coal for him all day, you should probably tell your dad.

just three days at maximum capacity, my smithing skill hit level 40 and it was time to begin working with gold. I'd been preparing for this for a while – I had plenty of precious ore in the bank ready to be forged into gold necklaces, one of *Runescape*'s best money-making trinkets.

Aside from the remarkably high profit margins, the best thing about working with gold was the simplicity. No additional ores or reagents were required to make a gold bar – a refreshing contrast to the logistical nightmares I'd had when mass-smelting steel. I wouldn't need coal again until mithril opened up at smithing level 50 – but I'd planned ahead for this by keeping at least 100 chunks squirreled away in the bank.

For the time being, I'd have to close the sweatshop down. Messaging as many suppliers as I could remember, my brief memo informed them that I didn't need any more coal, and that they should stop constantly mining it unless they wanted it for themselves. Some understood, but most didn't. Many had already mined a large quantity before I'd had a chance to tell them, which I bought out of a growing sense of guilt.

Many of these people again didn't



understand that this was a one-off final gesture, and took it as a sign that their long-term contract had been renewed. One child in particular flew off on a remarkable tangent when I told him that I didn't want his 20 pieces of coal, returning four days later with 200 pieces instead, as if that might somehow be more appealing.

I didn't realise I had a serious problem on my hands until my item bank ran out of storage space, filled to the brim with coal mined by children who should have been doing their homework, but instead thought they were making a profit from the friendly man called Magicpants, who traded them gold on street corners like it was sweeties.

The pits

Enough was enough, and the money wasn't worth it. Travelling back to the mining patch where I had first started mining coal myself, I hoped to find solace from the ghost of nostalgia. Instead, I was greeted with an impromptu company meeting.

One by one the miners dropped their tools and came over to seek their fortunes. "COLAMAN" "COAL" "MAGICPANS!!"

I wanted to apologise. I wanted to

explain that they'd been stupid, and that I'd been unfairly manipulative of that for personal gain. I didn't say anything. They'd understood so little of what I had said so far that I decided actions might speak louder than words. Surrounded by the heartbreaking reality of the pixel-poverty I'd built an empire on, I slowly removed every piece of my mithril armour – dropping them to the ground as a token apology for the collective wrongs of my evil regime. For a moment, I felt like Bob Geldof – which was obviously quite distressing. Logging off from the *Runescape* server, I left the college computer room and decided to join my friends at the pub.

Returning today, ten years later, I'm surprised I still remember my password. The first place to find atonement is likely my friends list, but it doesn't look like anyone I know has been online for a very long time. A lot can happen in a decade, and it's frighteningly likely that some of these children now have a couple of their own.

Travelling through the centre of Varrock, I'm overwhelmed by just how much the game has changed since I left it in 2001. My turquoise

beard is now a dull brown goatee, and my pink trousers have ceased to exist – and not even in a sexy way.

Amazingly, one of my previous contacts is still playing – a man called Grak who used to be a boy called |Joseph|. I think he used to know my brother. I ask if I'd paid him to mine coal for me ten years ago, but he doesn't remember.

I'd like to give something back to the community I once abused, but it's unclear what I can do to help. Ten years of change have evolved *Runescape* into what looks like a proper MMO, and I don't really understand what's going on. My attempts to buy a clear conscience are met with the shrug of an eroded economy. Illegal currency sellers offer millions of gold for the price of a fancy sandwich, and my enquiries as to whether or not my fortune of 55K is "a lot of money" are met with a simple answer: "No."

I used to be a *Runescape* mogul, but now I don't know what to do. JomboJames probably won't log on ever again, so the only option at this point would be to convince Jagex to give me his personal account details so that I could track him down and apologise in person. Maybe I could pop over to his house and give his kids a bag of coal. ■

GIFTAGEDDON!



Thousands of years ago, Mayan soothsayers looked to the stars and predicted this: in 2011, there will come a time when the world is rent asunder by the sheer weight of great free stuff that PC Gamer will give away in issue 233. The tides will rise, the skies will boil, and you will go "oh cool, free stuff!" That time is NOW. That time is GIFTAGEDDON. See below for full details on how to claim your *three* free gifts and potentially destroy the planet.

Tim Edwards

TIM EDWARDS
EDITOR
tim.edwards@futurenet.com



250 FREE SOE STATION Cash®

Outfit your hero in
DC Universe Online.

PAY STATION Free money to spend in Sony's Online games



Station Cash is Sony Online Entertainment's version of real money, made all small and jammed into their MMOs. It applies across their online range, letting you purchase in-game items for characters in titles like *EverQuest II*, *DC Universe Online*, and *Free Realms*.

What does this code give me?

250 free Station Cash. These points can be spent in SOE's games, in their respective marketplaces. You can use Station Cash to pay for most things in SOE's games, but not

subscription fees. But that's okay, because most of their games are free to play anyway.

How do I redeem my code?

You'll need an SOE account. Get one by heading over to soe.com and signing up in the top right. Once you're logged in, you'll need to click 'My Account', then 'Station Cash Balance'. Select 'Add Funds', go through to the next screen, and input your code into the bottom right box of the four payment methods. Click Go, and enjoy your free Station Cash.

What games can I use Station Cash in?

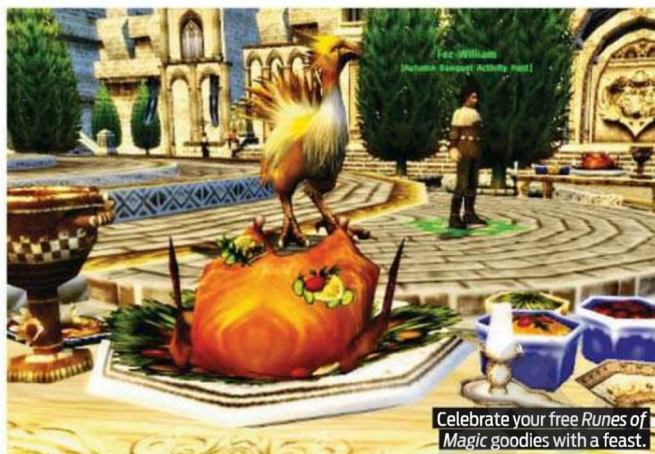
Most of SOE's online games, including: *Magic: the Gathering Tactics*, *Free Realms*, *Star Wars: Clone Wars Adventures*, *DC Universe Online*, *EverQuest*, *EverQuest II*, *PoxNora*, and *Pirates of the Burning Sea*.

What else do I need to know?

Your code is valid for a year. Come October 27, 2012, it'll have turned into internet dust and floated away. Oh, and don't forget to check the opposite page for tiny legal stuff. It's very important, even if it's small.



"We're getting a loft conversion so we can house all these charms..."



Celebrate your free Runes of Magic goodies with a feast.

£20 WORTH OF ITEMS IN RUNES OF MAGIC

NEW HOME Including a golden ostrich and a two-storey house



We bought you a new house! It's in *Runes of Magic*, and you're going to love it. It's spacious, with room for your axe. And my axe! Because we're nice, we've also filled your new *Runes of Magic* house with oodles of *Runes of Magic* goodies, including potions and an ostrich egg. Read on to find out how to move in.

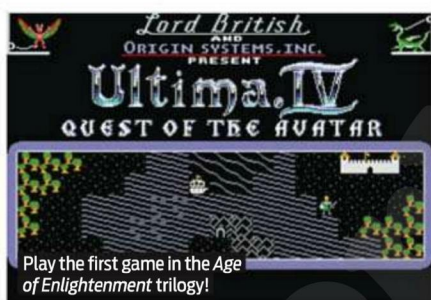
What does this code give me?

Deep breath. A golden ostrich egg that

grows into a mount, a luxurious two-storey wooden house with basement, potions of experience and skill that last a day, a 'nice surprise orb' that yields a random item, a basic weapon driller that lets you slot runes into your gear, a transport rune, a basic experience charm, an advanced moon jewel for buffing your armour power, and a scroll to transport you home. All that good stuff is worth a towering 579 diamonds – or £20 in puny mortal money.

How do I redeem my code?

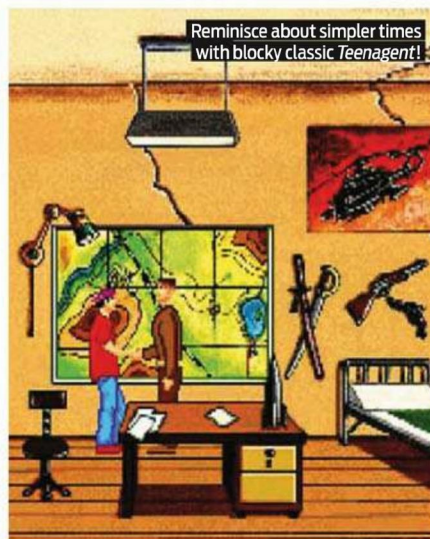
You'll need a *Runes of Magic* account, of course. To start gathering your goodies, log in and head to the 'Redeem Key' section of runesofmagic.com. Put your given code in, and you'll be given a shorter key. This key then has to be used in the in-game store to unlock your items. Don't forget the middle step, or you'll be homeless. And don't forget to read the small print below for the real-world legal gumph.



Play the first game in the Age of Enlightenment trilogy!



Pilot silly sounding ships in Tyrian 2000!



Reminisce about simpler times with blocky classic Teenagent!

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RETRO HEAVEN Six of GOG.com's best titles for nowt



They say the past is a foreign country. In that case, let's invade it! GOG.com is the universe's premier place to find optimised versions of yesteryear's best games, and we've cut you a special deal. Head over to the link on your card and sign up for the site, and you'll get six free retro-tastic games credited to your GOG.com account.

What does this code give me?

Six classic games, namely *Ultima IV*, *Beneath a Steel Sky*, *Tyrian 2000*, *Lure of the Temptress*, *Teenagent* and *Dragonsphere*, all for the recession-busting price of absolutely nothing.

How do I redeem my code?

Pop over to the link provided – gog.com/pcgftw – and sign up. Your six games will be sitting on your virtual shelf as soon as you've completed your registration.

What else do I need to know?

This stupendous deal only applies to new members, so people who already have a GOG.com account will miss out on the free stuff. Unless, of course, they have another email address. Just a suggestion. Also, please read the small print in the box on the right – it's really small, I know, but break out your magnifying goggles if you need to.

THE SMALL PRINT

- Offer cannot be redeemed for cash or other goods
- Station Cash code expires one year after issue on sale date, on the 26/10/2012. Any Station Cash redeemed will stay in your account indefinitely.
- Station Cash cannot be spent in PlanetSide
- Station Cash cannot be gifted or transferred, and items bought with Station Cash cannot be traded.
- Station Cash cannot be used to pay for subscriptions.
- Station Cash is tied to a player's account.
- Offers require sign-up with respective services and websites.
- Offer is for new UK users of gog.com who do not possess a gog.com account.

THE PC GAMER INTERVIEW

MARK KERN tells us why *Firefall* is free, how it was inspired by *Minecraft*, and why indie developers are the future. **By Owen Hill**

MARK KERN

**Chief creative officer,
Red 5 Studios**

Credits: *StarCraft*, *Diablo II*,
Warcraft III, *World of Warcraft*

So what's better, magic or science-fiction?

I'm definitely sci-fi. I had a
fantasy overdose working on
Diablo II and *WoW*. [Laughs.]

What do you think are the biggest influences on *Firefall* from the sci-fi genre?

Arthur C Clarke says any form
of technology, sufficiently
advanced, is indistinguishable
from magic. But now,
everything seems kind of
reasonable, right? And so the
sci-fi that we explored here
with *Firefall* has the exciting
possibility of inspiring real
scientists to create this stuff.
It's all within our grasp now. In
50 years or 100 years, we could
foresee this stuff happening.

Mark Kern has worked on some games you just might have heard of, including *StarCraft*, *Diablo II* and *Warcraft III*. Before leaving Blizzard, he was also the team leader on *World of Warcraft*.

When he founded Red 5 Studios in 2005 with *WoW*'s art director, and then hired the lead designer of *Tribes*, it was a good bet they'd make an interesting game. That game is *Firefall*, the free-to-play, massively multiplayer shooter, which is due out later this year.

Was *Firefall* always going to be a free-to-play game?

No. We started this studio over five ago, and at that time, subscription models were the big thing. I remember our investors at the time asking me, "Are you sure, because there are other ways..." and I said, "No, no, no - I'm sure!" And then we had the economic crash.

Can the free-to-play model have detrimental effects on a game's quality?

I think there are horrible ways to implement free-to-play. You've got to understand that for a lot of these large publishers, it's very

hard for them to comprehend how free-to-play would work and to take the risk of doing free-to-play with an AAA game. They're under the mentality that everybody must pay - no one gets a free ride.

Because of that, you get these warped models like, 'buy the box, pay a subscription, we'll give you in-game advertising and you have to buy microtransactions or sell power all at the same time.' That doesn't really work.

How are you doing things differently with *Firefall*?

The model that we believe in is this: it's free. All the content is free. There's no velvet rope that prevents you from playing with your paying friends, and you're not selling power - you're selling opportunity.

A good illustration of that is the *World of Warcraft* analogy where *WoW* has daily quests, for example. Maybe there'd be a way to say, "OK, you can get two daily quests instead of one, if you pay a little bit extra."

In Asia, you try everything for free. What was missing was the quality mark. We were sitting on an AAA game with an AAA budget - you know, as much as we'd spent on the original *WoW* - and we said, "Why not make that free?" As we did

With next-gen graphics and everything else, it's so expensive and your players exhaust that content faster than you can put it out. EA and BioWare really have to say: "We've spent hundreds of millions so far, we're prepared to do this for the long haul and spend hundreds more to keep the game going."

Are the *Borderlands* comparisons justified?

We had our art style when *Borderlands* was much more realistic, and when they switched, that was a real facepalm moment. But you know what? Thank goodness *Borderlands* is a great game, so the comparison is wonderful! Keep comparing us to *Borderlands*! [Laughs.]

There are a few MMOs and a lot of first-person shooters. Why haven't more people combined the genres?

I used to draw what I'd call the 'Circle of Suck'. *Tabula Rasa* came out and *Hellgate: London* came out, and I drew one circle that said "MMO gameplay" and I drew another circle that said "Shooter gameplay" and where they intersect, that little sliver, is full of suck.

We were trying to blend the two genres, but it wasn't fun. So we picked one or the other. Let's get the shooting right, and then let's selectively add in the MMO elements. Let's take the idea of open-world sandbox play and feature hundreds of players instead of four- or eight-player co-op. Let's take towns, crafting and resources and combine them all together. And that group would be a much more fun game when we started playing it than anything we'd tried before.

How are you going to make sure *Firefall* maintains its audience after release?

That's why we have such an e-sports focus, because we think that that's vital to getting players to play your game and keep coming back to it.

Being free-to-play helps because you have this constant stream of players. In *World of Warcraft* or any other standard MMO, you have



**Gamers are ready
for new things: it's
time to take risks**

the research and we did the math, it just made more and more sense.

Can MMOs get away with a subscription model? *Star Wars: The Old Republic* is sticking with the traditional model.

I think it can work. But the trap you get into, which *Star Wars* will face, is the content trap.

what's called 'churn rate', right? Every month some players leave your game and some new players come in. But if all your content is player-versus-player based, you're going to notice that churn a lot more.

You're going to notice players leaving because queue times get longer for matches, and you kind of get into this snowball effect where, as players turn off, it has a negative feedback effect on the system as players think, "Whoa, this game's getting empty," and you lose more and more people. I think this hurt the original *PlanetSide* as well.

I was going to ask that. Do you feel like you're going to be competing with *PlanetSide*?

Part of the reason we made this game is because on the *World of Warcraft* team, I was playing so much *PlanetSide*. I loved being a Galaxy pilot! I talked to John Smedley [CEO of Sony Online Entertainment – Fact Ed] recently and he's got some exciting things planned to make it even better, so I'm excited. I don't think we're competing because he's focused on these large Player vs Player conflicts, while we're focused on small, e-sports tournament maps and the sandbox, open, PvE world.

That said, we have had massive battles internally. The engine's capable of doing *PlanetSide*-style battles, but we haven't got that fun yet. Until we do, I don't think we'll be going anywhere near that territory.



How do you provide motivation for players to fight in PvE and PvP?

A lot of MMOs are about doing missions and raiding. Our game's really a resource game. It's about finding Crystite, the material that fell to Earth during the Firefall event, 55 years before the game started. The game's about acquiring these resources because you're going to craft them and power your Battleframes and customise your guns. There is a rich mission structure as well, but we were more inspired by games such as *Minecraft*.

Will it be like *Rift* where there's a kind of AI director almost dropping in events in different places?

It's very much an AI-director type of thing. This is a part of research at Red 5 that we take very seriously and that we've invested very heavily in. We've got the equivalent of super-computers out there in the cloud, so how do we utilise that to make a better game? We want to eventually be able to tell if we need to spread people out in a zone, to manage server load or to entertain them if we detect that they haven't been doing anything in a while.

What about the customisation side of things?

We have different heads and hairstyles you can swap, different skins, but a lot of the customisation goes into your armour and the Warpaint system, where you can colour different parts of your armour. We will eventually be releasing pattern and decal systems that go onto that armour for, say, your army and some other things.

That's actually a very rich source of revenue for us, because the aesthetic part is something we want to heavily monetise, so you'll see us putting a lot of work into customising your armour.

***Firefall* will be Red 5's first game. What challenges have you faced**

in starting a new studio?

An investor once told me that it's like climbing Mount Everest and forgetting to bring your oxygen tank. [Laughs.] That said, it's never been a more exciting time to start a gaming company.

There are so many tools out there, and there are so many financial investors interested. They may be concentrating on Facebook and iPad games right now, but I think you'll find that there's going to be this rich sort of independent movement.

We really need some fresh ideas, don't we? They're not going to come from the big publishers.

What, if anything, is holding the MMO genre back?

We've got to break out of the mould. If I see another action MMO combat game with exclamation points over quest givers, I'm going to commit seppuku! We're pouring so much money into a very stale formula and it's an illusion to say, "Oh, that's safety." It used to be safety, but not any more.

Gamers are ready to try different things and it's time to take risks, and I'm really looking towards the independents to try that. I want to see the Notch of MMOs.

Please don't spend \$200 million on another *World of Warcraft* clone because it just doesn't do anybody any favours and you're going to lose your shirt.

Is it possible for smaller developers to make MMOs though? Don't you need a massive backing of cash?

I don't think you do. I think that there are so many opportunities now with cloud-based servers. I think that a lot of off-the-shelf web technology can work now, whereas back then we had to create it all from scratch. There are so many more tools now to do it.

Firefall is currently in closed beta, and we wish we had access to it. ■

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This month: bad manners, pre-orders and playing on a sofa

SPK UR MND

■ In my mind, Adam Jensen does not sound like a Canadian action hero who's been gargling kerosene to cultivate a macho whisper that would make Admiral Adama hang up his 'tache.

Graham Russell
Why would he? He lives in Detroit.

■ I think to complete *Rollercoaster Tycoon* they should make it a resort by adding the chance for the gamer to set up their own park hotel. Because after all, this is happening to a lot to theme parks in the UK so customers make a weekend out of it instead of a day out.

Anna Bamber
We're holding out for a DLC pack where the recession strikes and you have to hand over management of the park in favour of spending all your time on the phone to the bank, managing loans, before going home to play Theme Park and sobbing at your lost dreams. But we're probably in a minority.

■ If you read the End User License Agreement for Origin it states that by installing Origin you're giving EA the right to monitor your PC and to make a profile of you.

Andrew Winston
Sure, but who has the time for that? Old Republic, ho!

■ Where should the line be drawn where a game should provide the opportunity for wrongdoing? Shooting prisoners? Shooting civilians?

Racist and homophobic

I've been playing *League of Legends* for the best part of a year now. Needless to say, it is ever-so-slightly awesome. The gameplay is fluid, tactical and engaging. However, the community leaves a lot to be desired. So much so that it is almost impossible to go into any game without a few people spewing vile combinations of angry, CAPS-LOCKED



When you win, you may dance the dance of glee.

words, often with racist and homophobic content.

I know that this isn't a problem unique to *LoL*, as *CoD* and *Halo* also suffer from this antisocial behaviour. Most people say it's something that can't be helped, but I'm not sure. In the world of professional sport, sportsmen are made to apologise, or have bans. There are consequences in every aspect of life, seemingly excluding the realm of games. Isn't there a way devs can police the chat-logs more effectively? It just makes me sad that funtime is becoming ragetime.

Olee Basuru

Agreed, gratuitous swearing is fucking disgraceful. League of Legends does have an interesting feature in the Tribunal, however, where the players themselves decide what

THE HOT MAIL

A tiny bit of text



A friend recently linked me a thread on the *StarCraft II* forum about how its UI discriminates against deaf gamers. Being both deaf and an avid *StarCraft* gamer I took a look. A brief glance through the comments on the thread merely confirmed a growing suspicion of mine: that game devs and the community simply don't care about handicapped gamers. It took many years before even having the option to turn on subtitles during cutscenes became the norm, and not everything even does that.

For many gamers, if it doesn't affect them, they don't care. The most prominent example and the subject of that thread was the nuclear launch warning in *StarCraft II*. The audio warning is apparently a booming voice

stating "NUCLEAR LAUNCH DETECTED!" The visual prompt? A tiny bit of text to neatly tucked away to the left side of the screen saying 'Nuclear launch detected', easily missed if you're in combat, macroing, or have a lot of units/structures building.

One memorable comment in the thread went so far as to claim all deaf people are blessed with supervision, so a small prompt should be sufficient enough for them. Would it really be so hard or financially crippling for game devs to include a 'deaf mode' for us?

Scott Ellershaw

We totally agree, and it goes for other things too, like colourblindness. It's not difficult to make a game cover at least the major disabilities. A bit of thought in testing goes a long way.

PCG

The best missive we receive every issue will win its sender a shock-proof 32GB USB drive worth £70, courtesy of our lovely friends at Corsair. Find out about these gadgets at www.corsair.com. See above for how to get in touch with PC Gamer!



"In the world of professional sport, sportsmen are made to apologise"

to do about troublemakers in exchange for free in-game money. That also has its issues, but it's an interesting start – as long as the community decides on the right acceptable levels.

PCG

Disturbingly common mindset

I thought I'd address PC elitism a bit. I love PC gaming. Always have and always will. It's a small minority of gamers which get on my nerves with comments like "the average console player would be stumped and use walkthroughs on a game like *Half-Life* which requires a bit of thought." This quote comes from a forum and may be extreme, but it is a disturbingly common mindset.

It's an unfair and frankly offensive thing to say to people who use consoles. Often people can't afford PC upkeep or can't give up the time required to keep a PC running well. There are a wealth of fantastic console games that can and should be exploited by those who play on PCs too. Playing on a sofa with friends is just a different experience.

Mark Brewerton

We suspect that these days walkthrough abuse is close to universal. Can't get through a door? Why bang your head against it when there's a GameFAQ and full YouTube

walkthrough up within five picoseconds anyway? But you're not going to stop the tribal wars. People love to pick on the 'other', and at least this spares us far more embarrassing squabbles about Intel vs AMD or other tedious nonsense like that.

PCG

UK and overseas

I wondered if, as one of the premier publications for gaming on the PC both in the UK and overseas, you have any opinions regarding the launch of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*. More specifically, the *Augmented Edition* in the UK is advertised as having both preorder bonus packs. However, despite paying a substantial premium to buy from Steam versus other vendors, this additional content is not supplied. I only paid for the *Augmented Edition* in order to access the in-game content.

The DLC is not even being offered as an optional purchase. Like many others, as a fan of the original *Deus Ex* I'd been waiting eagerly for this release, and, like many others, the experience has been soured by the decision to release many different versions which depend not only on whether you pre-order, but also upon which seller is used.

Gavin Martin

The sooner this pre-order nonsense ends, the better. At the very most, everything should be made available to everyone after a little while. The Witcher 2 did that. So should every other game.

PCG

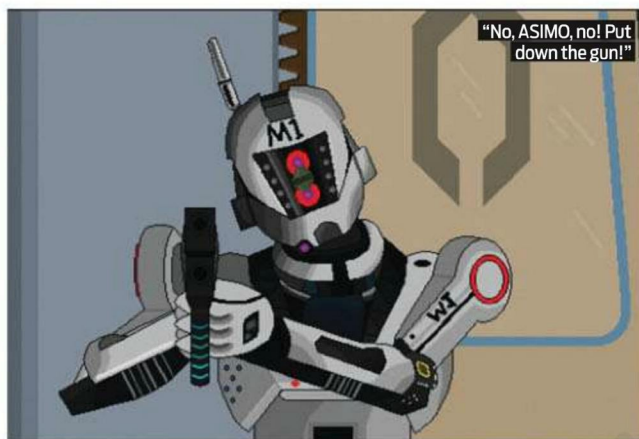
With insults, etc

I have an idea/suggestion and I thought you might be interested in hearing more about it. The main idea is a MOBA (*LoL*, *HoN*, *DotA*, *Dota 2* and more) educational portal that would be like a safe haven for new arrivals to this fast-growing but awfully difficult and competitive scene. As the learning curve of these games is so steep, many people get overwhelmed when starting off, and then later decide it's not for them after having to put up with insults, etc.

Tal Ron

Sounds good, go make it! MOBA/DotA/whatever clones

TOP DRAW



This month's annoyingly talented game art comes from Mr Zach Bennett, and if you can't tell what it is, here are three hints: It's not Pac-Man, it's not Lara Croft, and it's probably not the car from *Dirt 3*. If

you need more help than that, there's no helping you. You know who didn't need more help? Richard Clarke who recognised *Magicka* in PCG 231. Want to win a prize next month? Send in your scribbles. (Sorry, no prizes for answers.)

Send your daubings to pcgamer@futurenet.com – the one we like the best wins the voucher. No prizes for guessing the game, but the first to guess correctly gets their name in print.



aren't going anywhere for at least the next year, and there are at least a couple more on the way – Blizzard's StarCraft version and Petroglyph's Rise of Immortals. The more people who get to play, the better.

PCG

Hours before midnight

"Perpetual anticipation is good for the soul but it's bad for the heart." So wrote award-winning lyricist Stephen Sondheim, presumably also frustrated in having to wait for more than a decade for a proper sequel to his favourite videogame. Still, my



"This fast-growing but awfully difficult and competitive scene"

disk has finally arrived and all that remains is for me to complete the installation and start playing. Right?

"*Deus Ex: Human Revolution* cannot be installed yet, because it is not yet released."

As a consumer I choose to order from a company that often delivers its games the day before the official release date. Given that I have the paid-for product in my hand, what right does Steam or the publisher have to stop me from playing it? Does anyone really care if I get to play this big singleplayer release a few hours before midnight?

Friends with consoles did not face this problem. I even know one guy who pirated leaked code to access the game weeks ago. Why am I being punished for being a law-abiding PC user?

Mark Gibson

In fairness, console owners have historically had it worse due to region-locking (not that some PC publishers aren't getting into that now). Do publishers care about you playing a few hours early? Sadly, yes, mostly because retailers do. The more things move towards digital distribution, the more that'll change... though at the expense

SPK UR MND

Shooting children? Gang rape?

Simon Naylor

No, no, only in a bonus minigame, and no. We'd like to draw the line under being 'as rubbish as CoD Black Ops'.

■ With Cueball at the helm of hardware reviews, I was guaranteed to make the correct purchase for my 'pocket'. I would no longer be 'snookered' for choice, nor would the missus be able to 'black ball' me for spending more money than I needed to.

Dave Watkinson

Is that our cue to start punning too? We never balk at a challenge, as seen back (sp) in issue 124. Getting too in-depth might be a drag which other readers might cry foul at, butt... no. It wouldn't be fair to poor Adam to do any of that. This is, after all, his big break.

■ Went to Gamescom. Shook Gabe Newell's hand. Will never wash it.

Thomas Bennett

If you ask him nicely, he might let you.

■ I love your game reviews, because I then know what to buy, what's in it and how much it costs.

George Wright

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!

■ I just wanted to compliment you on the magazine, it's nice to read a magazine written by genuinely enthusiastic PC gamers. I would say though that your podcast is terrible!

Casey

What? But... but...

■ ...for my wallet, that is! It started with your *Minecraft* special, shortly followed by me buying it just before it became a beta. Then it was Rich's *StarCraft II* e-sports shenanigans. My most recent expenditure was *Frozen Synapse*.

Casey

Oh, you. You had us going for a moment. Round to your house.

TXT UR REVIEW

Text your review of around 20 words to 87474, using 'PCG' as the first word. Include your name, the game's name and a score.



Texts cost 25p plus your standard network charge

Fallout: New Vegas
Consistently brilliant, enthralling, captivating. Let down only by bugs and pretty bad gunplay.

92%
Joe Daviso

Dragon Age 2
It's not *Origins*, but still has its own strengths. *Legacy* was still a welcome addition however.

85%
TiMar_Firebrand

Space Marine
Visceral melee combat, free flow between ranged and close styles, lovingly great tribute to the setting.

90%
Flameinc

of cheap prices and wide availability. Swings and roundabouts. Both of them covered with sick.
PCG

Now considered vapourware

StarCraft: Ghost needs to be released. I know it was originally intended to be a third-person shooter but wouldn't it be cool if *StarCraft: Ghost* joined the ranks of *Half-Life*, *Halo*, and *Crysis* as a first-person shooter?

Some readers may not have heard about this cancelled game. Originally announced in 2002, this title was shelved in 2006. It is now considered vapourware because it was never released although demos are available.

With the advent of 3D gaming this may be the perfect opportunity to resume development of this long-awaited title. I remember when my jaw dropped after watching a preview. Blizzard's parent company Activision already has at least four developers renown for their first-person shooters.



"Have we started to see politically correct bad guys in games now?"

Treyarch would be an excellent candidate if they aren't preoccupied with developing another *Call of Duty* title.

Jeffrey Donahue

Bear in mind that StarCraft: Ghost was cancelled because Blizzard weren't happy with it, much like the Lord of the Clans adventure before it. Honestly? We would have liked to see it, but we bow to their judgement. The world could certainly have done without the Command & Conquer equivalent, Renegade.
PCG

Kick his ass

I've just completed *Fable 3* and *Dungeon Siege 3*. In both the main bad guy was portrayed as being evil because of circumstances that happened to him/her. So the developers want you to identify with the villain before you kick his ass? No thank you! I don't want my games to be shades of grey like real life – I want good vs evil and a good ass-kicking for the evil dude at the end of the game, like in *Dragon Age: Origins*. Have we started to see politically correct bad guys in games now?

Dave Christoffersen

Dragon Age, the game where your big enemy could join your party and sacrifice himself for the good of the world? Interesting example. Perhaps a less narrative driven genre would be more your cup of blood? We're quite glad developers are looking beyond "He's EEEVIL!" as a reason for ass-kicking to commence.
PCG

YOU'RE PLAYING



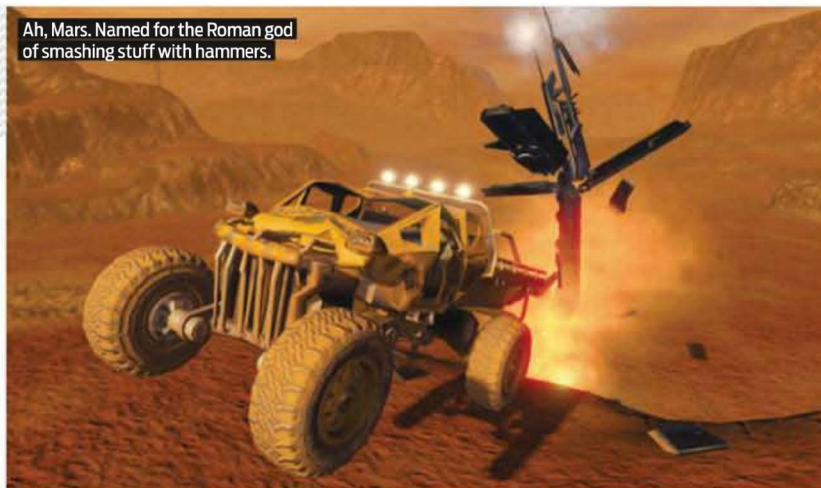
Alex James
Currently playing:
Red Faction: Guerrilla



I bought *Guerrilla* because, as it is for so many games, Steam's '75% off' sign is unnervingly attractive. It languished in my library, eagerly presenting its Install button at every opportunity. I eventually decided to press it, deciding that a PC Gamer score of 88% was actually rather good. From what I knew of the game, I expected a linear shooter with some gimmicky building destruction thrown in.

I was very wrong. It's no surprise that this is a product of a developer responsible for the excellent *Saints Row 2*, as the game would more appropriately be titled *GTA: Mars*. I was happily surprised to see that I had a choice of side missions mixed with the more focused plot missions. I was even more happily surprised to discover I could walk onto a road and commandeer a civilian's truck. My happy surprise reached almost dangerous levels as I drove that truck into a house and came out the other side, leaving a truck-shaped hole.

Ah, Mars. Named for the Roman god of smashing stuff with hammers.



The basic shooting is plain, but the building destruction easily makes up for it. I can think of no game that offers the same childish joy as you feel when you smash down a building, with your laughably powerful sledgehammer or an unstoppable heavy mech.

I was surprised yet again to discover the game's plot. Although your character's love-interest begins dull, and the plot seems

simple at first, I found myself becoming actually a little interested in what was going on. It's not Oscar-winning material, but it's enough to keep you not skipping cutscenes, which is more than many games deliver.

That's a theme that echoes throughout the game. *Red Faction: Guerrilla* isn't fantastic, and it has many flaws, but it's a game I will remember forever for sheer fun.



Tell us about the game you love, and why, in 300 words. Write to the usual place, and include your name and a photo. The best piece each month wins 2GB of Crucial Ballistix RAM carefully chosen for their PC by Crucial's experts – see www.crucial.com/uk.



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PLAY

JOIN OUR WORLD OF FRIENDLY FIRE



OCT
28

Battlefield 3 released

We'll have a server ready to roll with DICE's multiplayer shooter.

NOV
01

Play among yourselves

A last farewell to our *Minecraft* server's current map.

08

Modern Warfare 3 released

Call of Duty aims to continue its chart domination, now with dedicated servers.

11

Skyrim released

Discuss it excitedly on pcgamer.com/forum.

20

Play among yourselves

Emerge, blinking, from the catacombs of *Skyrim* and hop on our *TF2* server.

Become part of the wonderful PC Gamer community, and make more friends than you could ever eat.

THE PC GAMER STEAM COMMUNITY POPULATION 43,793



Great news for fans of joining groups made up of more than 43,790 people: our Steam community is always accepting new members. We've got players of every kind of game on there, but that's just one shard of the vast PC

Gamer community. We've got successful clans, guilds and corporations in games from *EVE Online* to *Rift* – as well as pockets of PCG friendliness in the wilds of *Minecraft* and *Wurm Online*.

Are you all alone in an MMO, or the

lonely soul playing a shooter? Do you want some friends to make your experience better? Let us know at pcgamer@futurenet.com, and we'll see if we can help.

HOSTED BY  MULTIPLAY



MINECRAFT

IP: 83.222.240.186 Port: 28265

Our *Minecraft* server welcomes careful builders. Start creating your very own life-sapping project.



TEAM FORTRESS 2

IP: 85.236.100.18 Port: 27115

Friendly *TF2* server with GSOH WLTM experienced players and noobs alike. Must love hats.



LEFT 4 DEAD 2

IP: 85.236.100.18 Port: 27615

Valve's shooter is still one of the finest co-op games the world has seen. Find a friend and hop on, or come alone.



KILLING FLOOR

IP: 85.236.100.18 Port: 7957

We're still booting it up for lunchtime sessions, and you should too. See what your boss says first, mind.

HOW TO JOIN THE STEAM COMMUNITY

STEP 1

If you don't already have a Steam account, head to www.steampowered.com, download the client, run it and sign up.

STEP 2

Install your games from the Steam client. If you're having technical problems, hit the forums at the Steam site.

STEP 3

In the community tab of the Steam client, search for PC Gamer and join our group. Then chat, play and troll to your heart's content.

PLAYER
OF THE MONTH

Who? fraimbog
Where? *Minecraft* server
Why? Tireless dedication to the server, stopping griefers and helping noobs.

NOW PLAYING

Rift

Forum: bit.ly/pcgrift
Trion Worlds' MMO has kept its head high since launch, retaining a hefty player base with a combination of tough raids and an ethereally beautiful world. If you're pottering across the planes of Telara, you could do worse than join our band of intrepid adventurers, led by a committee of guild officers. We're a great guild for newer and lower level players, but we also want some top-end players to organise and lead raids. If you fancy leading the charge into Telara's depths, join up on the forum link above.

WoW

Guild name: PCG
Server: Steamwheedle Cartel

Apply: bit.ly/pcgwowguild

Ogre golf. That's what you can expect if you join the PCG WoW guild. And the Ogre golf doesn't stay Ogre golf for long. During a recent event, guild officer Bimble described how the guild decided to go for a swim instead of continuing on the links. Later, the decision was made to find who could survive a fall into the pool from a great height. The answer: not many people. Head over to the forum to join up if you think you'd enjoy such shenanigans.

Wurm Online

Forum: bit.ly/pcgwurm

Ever wanted to pack it all in and go live in the forest? At the PC Gamer village, you won't need expensive divorce proceedings or a tense conversation with your boss to achieve that dream. *Wurm* casts you as a tiny peon in a dangerous world. Our village is a haven against things that creep in the woods – ideal when a chance encounter with a goblin can leave you maimed and crying. Look for directions at the forum link above.

All mined out

It's time for a *Minecraft* server reset

At the time of writing, the map on our *Minecraft* server is huge.

Exported, it takes up 2.4GB, where most maps circle around the 100MB mark.

It's also beautiful. Our intrepid builders have made incredible things, including and not limited to: a full-scale replica of *Mass Effect*'s Normandy, a 40-foot version of JC Denton's face, a

fully functional supermarket that dispenses items at the push of a button, and a Nyan Cat rainbow that extends to the top of the skybox.

Sadly, our map is so huge it's causing problems: connections are crapping out, and recent building history is being lost. Like all beautiful things, it can't last. We're going to tear it up and start again.

BRAVE
NEW
WORLD



JUSTICE ON EVE'S FINAL FRONTIER



Friendly warning: don't try to steal from our *EVE* corporation. We have allies in powerful places. Just ask Dredish Badasaz. Dredish was once a member of our space guild, PCG-Enterprises, but decided to engage in some light thievery. She flew away from the corp with 700 million ISK of pilfered cash, and docked at a station far enough out of PCG-E's operational range as to think she was safe. After a recent amicable corp split, Dredish counted

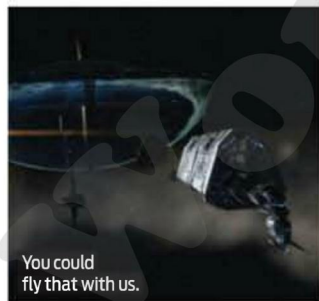
on ex-PCG-E pilots now engaged primarily in PvP action to ignore the concerns of their previous partners. Dredish was dead wrong.

Friend of PC Gamer, Count Wilson, managed to locate Dredish's ship docked at a station. The good Count is something of a legend in his corner of space, with an entire corporation devoting much of their flight time to trying to kill him (see bit.ly/noPnE7 for incredible details – to date, Wilson has fought his way out of three separate deathtraps, and took down 30 odd ships during a fourth). The Count – still very much in contact with PCG-E's

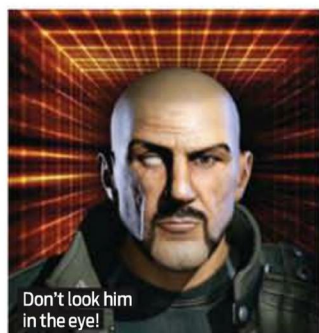
management – informed our pilots that he'd found our crook.

Wilson made it apparent to Dredish that she wouldn't be leaving the station without returning the cash. After some negotiation, and much whimpering, the Count took payment of the nicked ISK. Dredish explained her reasons for the theft, but the protestations didn't sway the Count, who summarily executed her for her impudence. Space justice in action.

If you'd like to join up and fly with these kind of badasses, head over to bit.ly/pcgeve. Just try not to nick anything, OK? ■



You could fly that with us.



Don't look him in the eye!

In space, we can still hear you scream.



WIN!

The winner of PCG 230's 'Panzer on Fire' competition

We were advancing from PC Gamer's beachhead on Console Island when they struck. Crouched in the bushes, Tim turned to us – his loyal battalion – and told us to hush.

We felt a rumble. A rumble deep enough to shake our bones and weaken our bladders. It could only mean one thing: tanks.

We knew they were coming. Partly because we'd heard reports of massing armour from our scouts, and partly because back in issue 230 we asked you to make a whole load of tanks for our competition

celebrating *World of Tanks*.

As we cowered, the rumbling stopped. Tim cautiously signalled the advance. We thought we were safe. Then the first entry burst through the treeline. It was Steven Thorley's 'Reviewatron' – two foot of red and black plastic, armed with a wicked cannon that had to be glued back on after it fell off in the post.

I'm not too proud to tell you we scattered.

Tim led the stragglers towards a nearby village. We were close, but as we neared it, Stacy Schwarz's matchstick tank trundled out, cutting us

WHAT DOMINIC WON...

- Thermaltake Level 10GT case
- 24X Double Layer Dual Format DVD R/RW + CD-R/RW DRIVE
- Intel Core i5 2500K quad core 3.3GHz
- Asetek 510LC / Xtremegear liquid cooling system
- 1TB SATA-II 3.0Gb/s 16Mb cache hard drive
- 4GB PC10666 DDR3/1333MHz dual channel memory
- MSI P67A-C45 P67 DDR3 Intel LGA1155 DDR3 ATX mainboard
- Microsoft Windows 7 Home Premium (64-bit edition)
- 700W power supply
- Nvidia GeForce GTX 560 1GB 16X PCIe video card



off. Granted, it wasn't the most practical of vehicles – war machines made of matchsticks don't tend to do too well on the battlefield – but it put the wind up us good and proper.

At a sprint, we made it to a belltower. Scanning our surroundings, we saw a beast on the horizon. Dominic Walker's tank – made entirely

of PC parts including a hard drive and four sticks of RAM, and painted a ghostly white – had crested a hill. We nervously looked at each other as the plastic monstrosity turned its cannon toward our hidey hole.

We had no choice but to surrender, and crown it the king of tanks. Dominic: we give up. You win the PC.

The winning entry...

'THE HARD DRIVE'

by Dominic Walker



Now win this...

An orchestral PC

Graham reviewed *Red Orchestra 2: Heroes of Stalingrad* this issue (p96), and called it the best murder simulator he's ever played. The game's developers, Tripwire, have put an inordinate amount of effort into modelling the moment a bullet rips through flimsy cloth and into the squishy flesh of the man behind it. It's so traumatic that Graham has taken to wearing period-era fatigues and staring into the middle distance, hugging his knees and moaning.

Of course, he was doing that before he started playing *Red Orchestra 2*, but his moans have got notably more mournful after days spent in bombed-out Stalingrad. Tripwire have aced the kind of war-is-hell minutiae that spark mental collapses. The rifles have a sense of feedback unlike any other shooter. Bring one to the eye to aim and the battlefield swims into focus. Conversely, when your hiding position is peppered by one of your

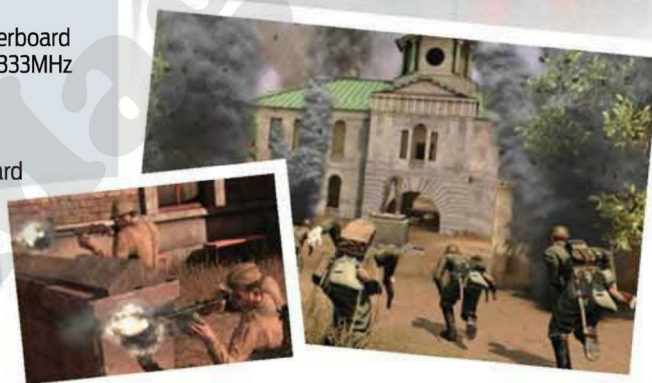
battlefield enemies your vision blurs, replicating the kind of abject panic only a man being shot at can experience.

We think that's the kind of experience everyone should have. But to fully lose your mind to battle-terror, you'll need a PC capable of rendering the eastern front in all its filth-stained enormity. The good news is that we've got just such a PC to give away to one lucky winner, courtesy of Tripwire. To find out how to get your frost-bitten mittens on it, take a look below.

THE PRIZE

- Intel Core i7 CPU 2600K overclocked to 4.5GHz
- GigaByte GA-Z68A-D3 motherboard
- RAM Kingston 2x2GB DDR3 1333MHz
- HDD 1TB F3
- 24X DVD+-RW
- FC NZXT Sentry fan control
- VGA GTX 560 1GB graphics card
- CoolerMaster HAF 912 Case
- Asetek water cooling
- PSU Cyberpower 800W

WORTH
£1,000



HOW TO WIN

Design the revolution

We want you to create some Soviet-worthy propaganda for PC Gamer. Look to history for examples of the format: think posters, short films, and leaflets, and use our gloriously totalitarian red and black colours. The best and most imaginative propaganda wins the PC.

COMPETITION RULES By taking part in a Competition, you agree to be bound by the Competition Rules which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at www.futurenet.com/futureonline/competitionrules.asp. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Competition is open to all GB residents of 18 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a Competition you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the Company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that

the Competition entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.

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after the specified closing date. Winner(s) will be notified by email or telephone within 28 days of the closing date. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Prize Draw is open to all GB residents of 16 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a Prize Draw you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Prize Draw and for promotional purposes. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Prize Draw Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.

Name

Address

Postcode

Email

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Send your competition entry and this form to: **The 'Full Marx' competition, PC Gamer, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW.**

The closing date for this competition is November 23, 2011.

Your contact details from this entry form will only be used for contacting you if you are a winner. For terms and conditions applying to PC Gamer competitions, point your eyes at the small print leftwards.



AND THE WINNERS ARE...

It's been an incredible year for gaming and now it's time to find out who's won a Joystick in the world's biggest games awards voted for by the great gaming public.

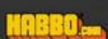
See who won at
www.goldenjoystick.com

Find us, follow us



DID YOU WIN?

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REVIEWS

How we review

Wherever possible, we finish every game before finalising the review. We review each game on its own merits, and try to match it to a reviewer who's a passionate expert in the field. The main aim of the reviews section is to help you make buying decisions. As such, we'll review paid-for content of all types in addition to the latest big-name releases.

Our scoring system explained

0-30% Intolerable

A crime against gaming. Whether it's bugs or bad design, this should be shot on sight.

31-45% Weak

Serious flaws ruin any chance this game has of offering sustained fun.

46-60% Mediocre

A very ordinary game, quickly forgotten. Think twice even if you find it cheap.

61-75% Fair

A decent effort that, but for a little more polish, coulda been a contender.

76-89% Good

Enjoyable, well-made and entertaining – just falling short of true greatness.

90%+ Editor's Choice

Oozing class, this is the work of experts at the top of their game. Bravo, sirs!



A game scoring 90% or more is the proud recipient of a PC Gamer Editor's Choice award. The

Editor's personal seal of approval means we think the recipient is a truly great example of its genre.

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Anger management

It wasn't *Doom* or *Quake* that got me into PC gaming; it was *Half-Life* and *Thief*. I've always wanted a little bit more than double barrels and killamajigs.



Yet even I know that id Software are inextricably linked to the rise of the PC as a gaming platform, so a new game from John Carmack and his team deserves attention. Especially a new IP. These guys defined the PC, and now they've parked *Rage* in their garage.

id make fun games in nice engines. *Rage* is good, lots of fun, but in a way it shows where id have been spinning their wheels. The man-shoots are good, but the world, the mission, the driving, have all been done before. I sound like such a grump, but after *Deus Ex*, and with *Skyrim* on the way, I kind of want more.

Craig Pearson

CRAIG PEARSON
NEWS EDITOR
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Let us know what you think

Get in touch via our 'Send' section on page 72 or via our forum at www.pcgamer.com/forum.

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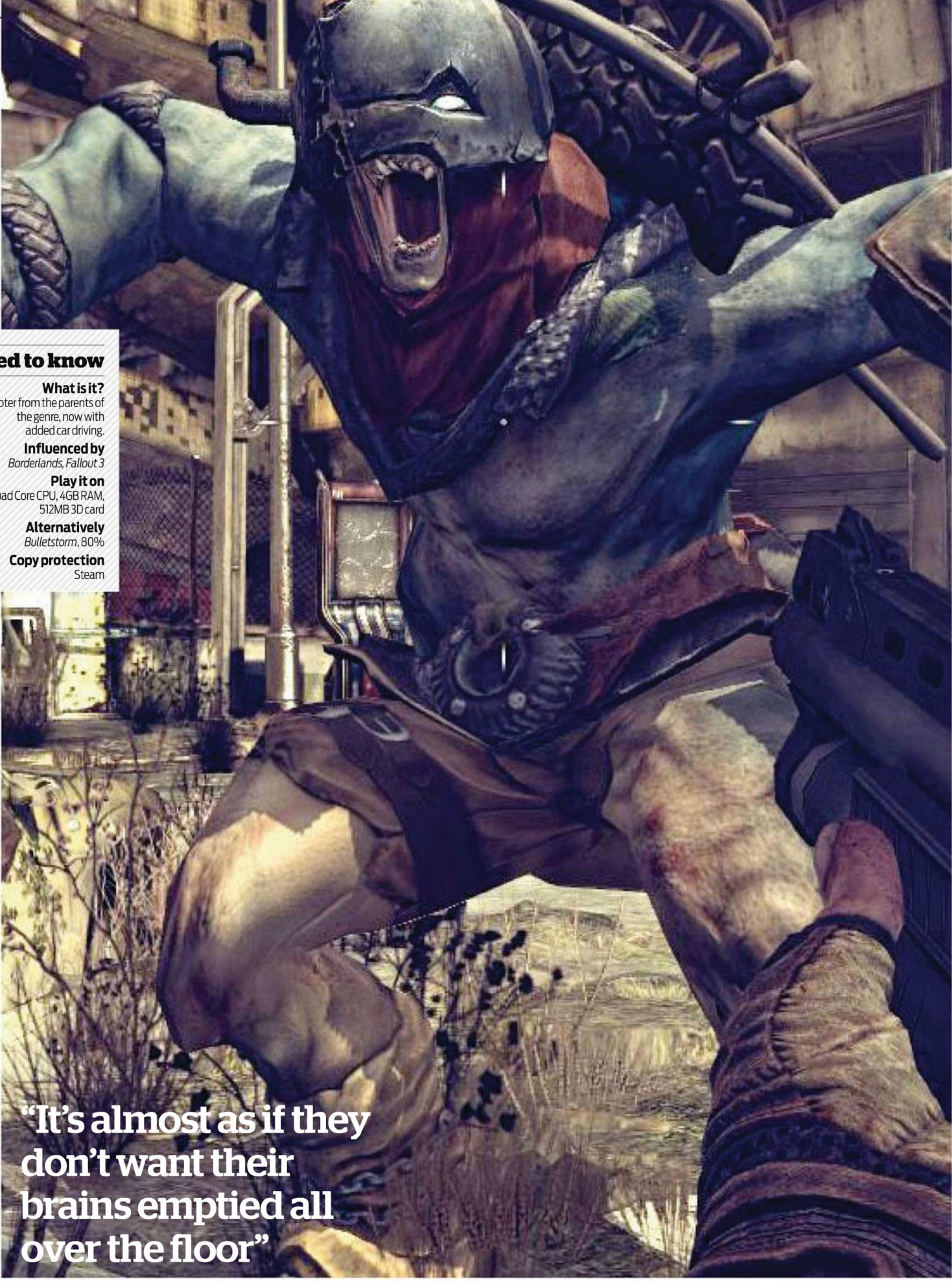
THEY'RE BACK

Populous 120

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Need to know

What is it?

A shooter from the parents of the genre, now with added car driving.

Influenced by

Borderlands, Fallout 3

Play it on

Quad Core CPU, 4GB RAM, 512MB 3D card

Alternatively

Bulletstorm, 80%

Copy protection

Steam

“It’s almost as if they don’t want their brains emptied all over the floor”

WRATHER GOOD

This is id's first new world in 20 years. But is **RAGE** worth the wait, or will it just make you angry? **By Rich McCormick**

I've just picked up a keycard, and I'm confused. I found it in a power station, out in *Rage*'s wasteland. It was about a foot wide, and bright blue, and now it's in my inventory. What the hell do I do with it? Do I sell it? I swear I've done this before. Does it... does it go in this bright blue door, over here?

Swoosh. The door opens.

For all its open roads and bright blue skies, for all its sweeping canyons and hub towns, *Rage* is still resolutely an id Software shooter. For all their pre-release bluster of expansive worlds and template departure, no one knows this better than id Software. The keycard is as much of a nod to their previous works as the *Doom* mug collectibles players can sell to shopkeepers, but it also feels like an acknowledgement of a design lineage: despite the apparent differences, *Rage* is the continuation of the corridor.

You wake from cryo-sleep as one of the world's last super-soldiers. You've been put in the freezer and sent into space due both to your perceived aptitude at rebuilding societies after mini-armageddons, and your badassitude. But – as the desiccated corpses of your chums in the tubes next to you demonstrate – something went a bit wrong. It's 106 years after

the mildly explained apocalyptic Bad Thing happened, and the destroyed world has split between rival gangs of mentalist bandits, flesh-eating mutant freaks, moustache-twirlingly evil fascists, and honest folks trying to make a living. It's this latter lot with whom you throw in your hat-made-of-guns.

These folks might peddle an image of the innocent settler, but almost everyone you meet on a polite conversational basis – as opposed to those who want to make your skin into a coat – wants you to go and eradicate swathes of humanity. *Rage*'s missions don't need much explanation: you're sent down into a pit, and once you're in there, there's no talking to the man-monsters that dwell within.

Paths of gory

I followed tight paths through power plants, down sewers, and cliff-top shanty towns. Doors are kept conspicuously shut, partly to dissuade the dream of deviation, but also so the same area can be rearranged and returned to as part of another, later mission. Missions aren't ever complicated, but they are consistently well paced and imaginative – never too short, rarely too long – and spotted with the right amount of spectacle and surprise.

Rage's post-apocalyptic wasteland regularly opens out into bowls and basins: little thunderdomes for the game's car combat. They give players space to use their vehicles' boost and handbrake, time to deploy rockets, machineguns and strange pulse weapons to immolate the bandits on their tail. But these sections aren't the norm, just thicker beads on the thread connecting the game's three hub-towns. Driving between these townships is where you work through *Rage*'s more typical shootery bits: murder anyone who gets in your way and never stop moving forward. And there's

absolutely nothing wrong with that.

There's not much to distract in the wasteland, in any case. Hub towns provide missions, each of which requires *Rage*'s Mr Rage (not his real name, but better than his actual title of Mr Buzzcut Generosoldier) (also not his real name) to go to an allotted place and introduce bullets to the skulls of everyone who lives there. Accept a quest and you'll be given a little marker to head for. Chug around the game's outsidy bits without a quest and you'll find a true wasteland: there's little to do beyond wreck the handful of car-driving bandits who respawn every time you poke your head out of a settlement. I quickly started to reserve my jaunts outside to mission-specific journeys, only hopping in my car when the job asked me to leave town.

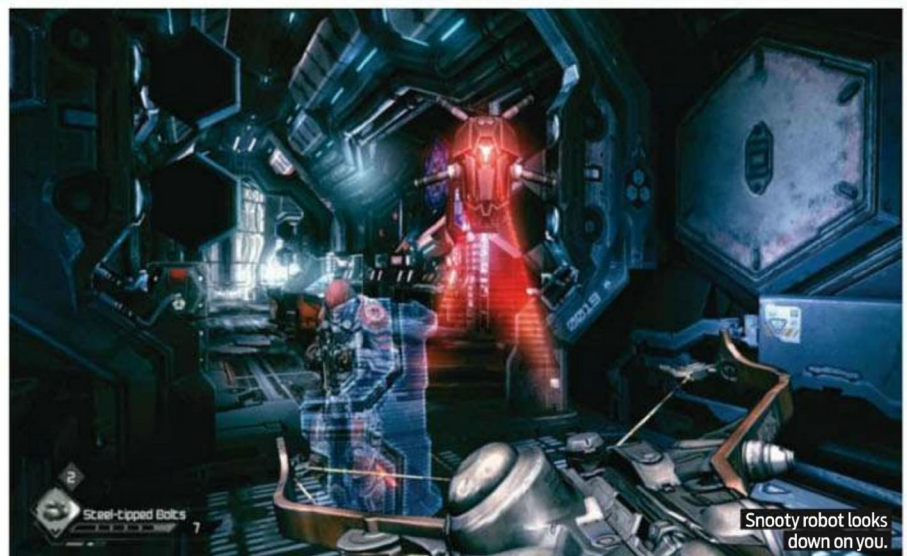
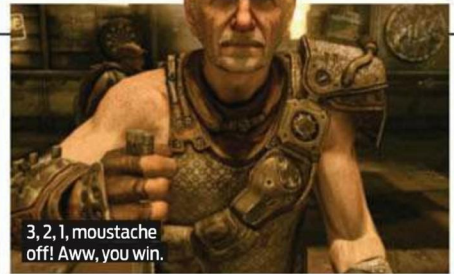
The jobs did that often. In a ten-hour game, I spent about an hour at the wheel, and a few more in multiplayer (the only competitive modes are vehicle battles, and two player co-op missions the only way to shoot with a friend on foot). Fortunately, *Rage*'s vehicles are fundamentally pleasing to drive. They feel responsive, even with the binary input of a keyboard. But better than that, they feel *fast*.

Each comes with a boost capability. It's designed to give you the edge in races or let you outrun bandits, but I found a tertiary use for it while at the handlebars of the game's first ride. Fresh out of the Ark – the game's space-bunker equivalent of *Fallout*'s Vaults – I was given the keys to a little quadbike runaround. It wasn't the most intimidating machine I'd drive in the game: by the end, I'd unlocked another three vehicles of increasing power. But while they let me shred enemies in a few salvos, they didn't allow me to hurtle into an immovable bollard at 100mph, launch my screaming marine 30 feet through the air, smash my spine against a wall, then ▶

Watch your fingers

How to win at *Rage*'s knife minigame





flit back to consciousness next to my bike as if I'd not just reduced my skeleton to slurry.

This pulse of mischievous fun beat a little weaker in later driving sections. At the wheel of the final Monarch car, I was so overpowered in comparison with my bandit peers that battles were dull dominations.

Races – organised by the bored NPCs at each hub – provide a secondary reason to drive. They don't affect the main story directly – but success in the ranks wins you racing credits, which can be pumped into the upkeep and outfit of the car you use in the wasteland. Races fall into three types: time trial, rocket race and rocket rally. Time trials are about perfectionism, where you hit boost refill power-ups to keep yourself travelling at just sub-mach speeds. The rocket brothers are more brutal, asking players either to complete a course in first place or to pass through an ever changing series of checkpoints while three enemies pepper their car-arse with rockets. The first is too easy – just boost to get ahead on the first lap and you won't be touched. The second is often screamingly too hard.

I played *Rage* in a room with other people playing *Rage*. Once, just after passing through the final checkpoint on my fifth attempt at a rocket rally, I looked up to see someone shooting a mutant in the face. For a second, confusion flickered in my mind. What game were *they* playing? That moment is the greatest compliment I can pay to *Rage*'s driving sections: although oddly divorced from the main game, the base mechanics behind car control are surprisingly solid for the work of a shooter studio.

All the guns

And the shooting itself? It feels good: each weapon is blessed with a distinctive bark and kick. id have jettisoned the modern shooter's neurotic arsenal restrictions, letting players carry nine weapons around on their travels, each safely secreted on a number key. Most have two or more ammunition types, their rarity roughly concomitant with either their usefulness or ridiculousness. The functional secondary ammo for the Authority machinegun, for example, simply rips through armour faster. The pistol's third

Play your cards right

In the hub-towns, this collectible game is all the *Rage*



ammunition type typifies the other approach: it fires an entire eight round clip in one go, and the bullets are shaped like Pez dispensers made of human bones.

Sadly, there's some artlessly wedged-in console crossover nonsense when it comes to controlling the shooting. Creative director Tim Willits argues that *Rage* plays better on a pad, and so for hot-swapping between ammo and weapon types, we sensible mouse-and-keyboardnauts are lumbered with a strange setup that forces us to assign weapons to one of four slots. Ammo can still be switched by cycling, but it adds a user-unfriendly sheen to fights, and makes precise control trickier.

That control is important. The game's enemies are tricky bastards, juking and jiving away from your ironsights. I'm used to my FPS opponents sprinting directly toward me, pointing at their foreheads and screaming "AIM HERE!" *Rage*'s mutants and bandits duck as they close on you, hop out of bullet volleys, and use walls and railings to get the purchase necessary for an attacking leap. It's almost as if they don't want their brains emptied onto the floor, and it's both infuriating and admirable: the former for a millisecond as you waste the ammo,

the latter for longer because scraps are kept fresh and tense. Only later in the game, as the enemies slather on thicker armour and keep their feet on the ground, do firefights descend into cover leapfrog.

But by that point, I wasn't doing much of my own shooting anyway. *Rage* comes with a crafting system, fed by a mini economy. Every surface is littered with bric-a-brac to sell or use – it's a dream game for compulsive tidiers. Recipes can be purchased for various battlefield gadgets. The humble wingstick – a razor sharp boomerang that removes heads at 20 paces – is the most useful, but I fell in love with the spiderbot. I spent the game's anticlimactic final level letting my robo-chums do my annihilation for me, stepping into fire only when I wanted to try out the BFG rounds for my chaingun. Both approaches – dirtying your hands and standing back – feel satisfying.

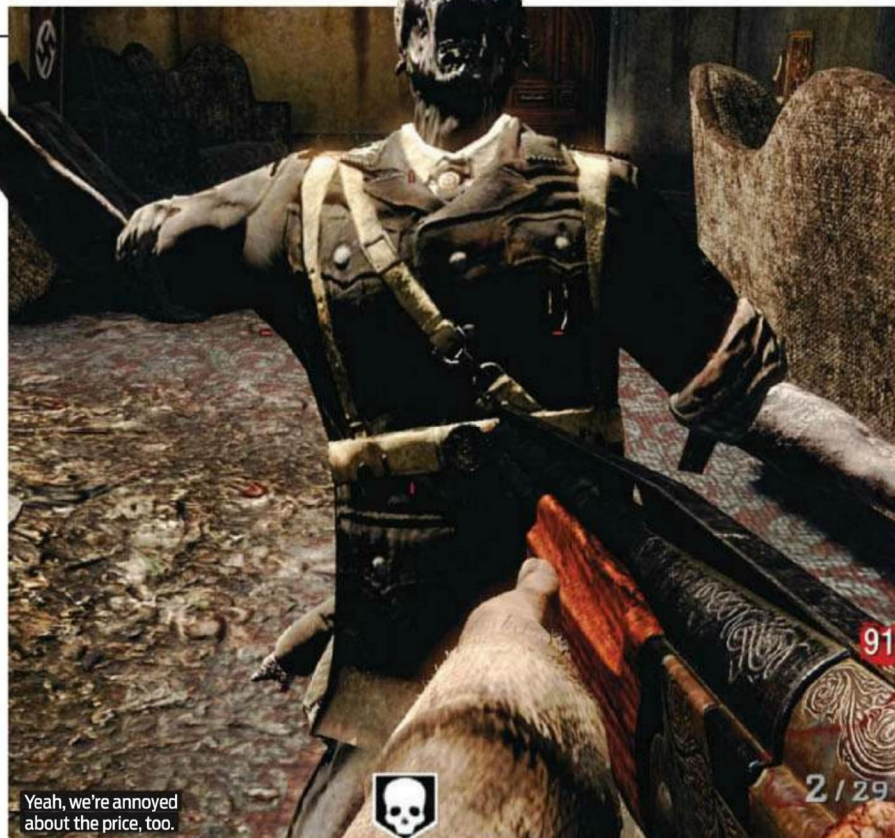
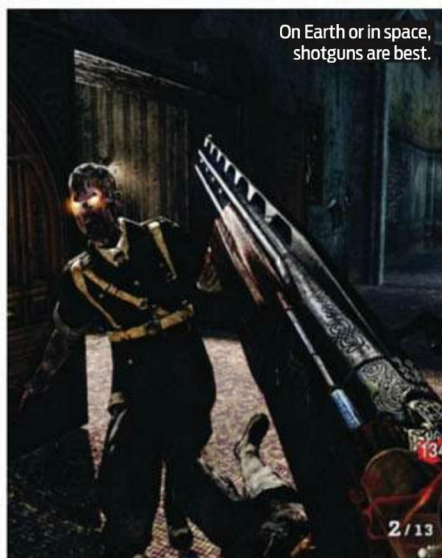
Rage isn't a complicated game. Despite what the developers might have suggested and we might have assumed, it's still set in a corridor. Fortunately, id still make some of the finest corridors in the world. ■

VERDICT

id haven't strayed far from their roots, but they still know how to make a top-quality shooter. Simple, satisfying fun.

PC GAMER
84

"It's a dream game for compulsive tidiers"



LAST GASP

In **CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS REZURRECTION**, the zombies want your brains *and* your money. **By Tom Senior**

Need to know

What is it?

CoD: Black Ops DLC adding four remastered zombie maps, and a new one set on the moon.

Influenced by

Left 4 Dead, the works of George Romero, money

Play it on

Intel Core 2 Duo CPU, Nvidia GeForce 8600GT/ATI Radeon X1950, 2GB RAM

Alternatively

Left 4 Dead 2, 92%

Copy protection

Steam

I remember storming the beaches of Normandy five years ago in one of *CoD* 2's most tense and memorable levels. Yesterday in *Black Ops* I shot a zombie on the moon with a gun that made it vomit blood then explode. What the hell has happened to *Call of Duty*?

Whatever our memories of the shooter series, the zombie survival mode introduced by Treyarch in *World at War* has frequently been the best part of the regular *Call of Duty: Black Ops* packs. It follows, then, that a DLC pack made up of five zombie levels should be the best. It is, but not by much.

Moon is the centrepiece. You and three friends start out in a facility in Area 51, with zombies rising from the mud around you. Every few minutes a horn will sound and the zombies become faster and more powerful. Anyone frustrated by the

boredom of the first few waves of a zombie map will greatly prefer this frantic opening. Within two minutes, the swarms will force you to take the cackling teleporter to the lunar surface.

You'll find yourself in low gravity, gasping for air. Snatching an HEV mask will give you oxygen and eerily mute the sound of gunfire and incoming zombies. Like all of *Black Ops*' zombie maps, you must use the points you've gained popping zombies to open doors to new parts of the level. Your first task is to turn on the power generator to restore gravity and oxygen to the warren of creepy moon-base corridors. If you fight deep enough into the facility you'll get the wave gun that cooks zombies inside out. Restoring power also enables you to tear off your HEV mask so you can hear where the zombies are coming from, but it can be more fun to stay outside

where a shotgun blast can send a nearby zombie flying into space. Low gravity is brilliant.

The other four maps aren't so inventive. They're almost identical versions of the four *World at War* zombie maps that *Black Ops* limited edition owners have been playing for months, with some upgraded lighting and slightly reshuffled weapons. The basic ruined house of Nacht der Untoten and the gloomy swamps of Shi No Numa represent the Zombies mode in its most skeletal and boring form. The huge Tesla coils of the experimental Nazi facility in Der Reise are more fun, but the real star of the resurrected maps is Verrückt [*German for crazy* – Foreign Ed]. This splits your squad of four into two teams who must fight through a building to reunite, shooting zombies off each other's backs across a large central square.

It's telling that of all the *Black Ops* DLC packs the most worthwhile is 80% recycled material. *Rezurrection* is the best of a miserable bunch. Moon is good, but not £11.50 good, and it all seems moot when you can shell out an extra £2.50 and get *Left 4 Dead 2* or *Killing Floor* for some more substantial, meatier zombie slaying. ■

VERDICT

Moon is mad, low-g fun, but four-fifths of the pack is nearly three years old. There are better ways to spend £11.50.

PC GAMER
50

◆ Expect to pay £11.50 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Activision ◆ Developer Treyarch
◆ Multiplayer Up to 4 ◆ Link bit.ly/cp7pwn

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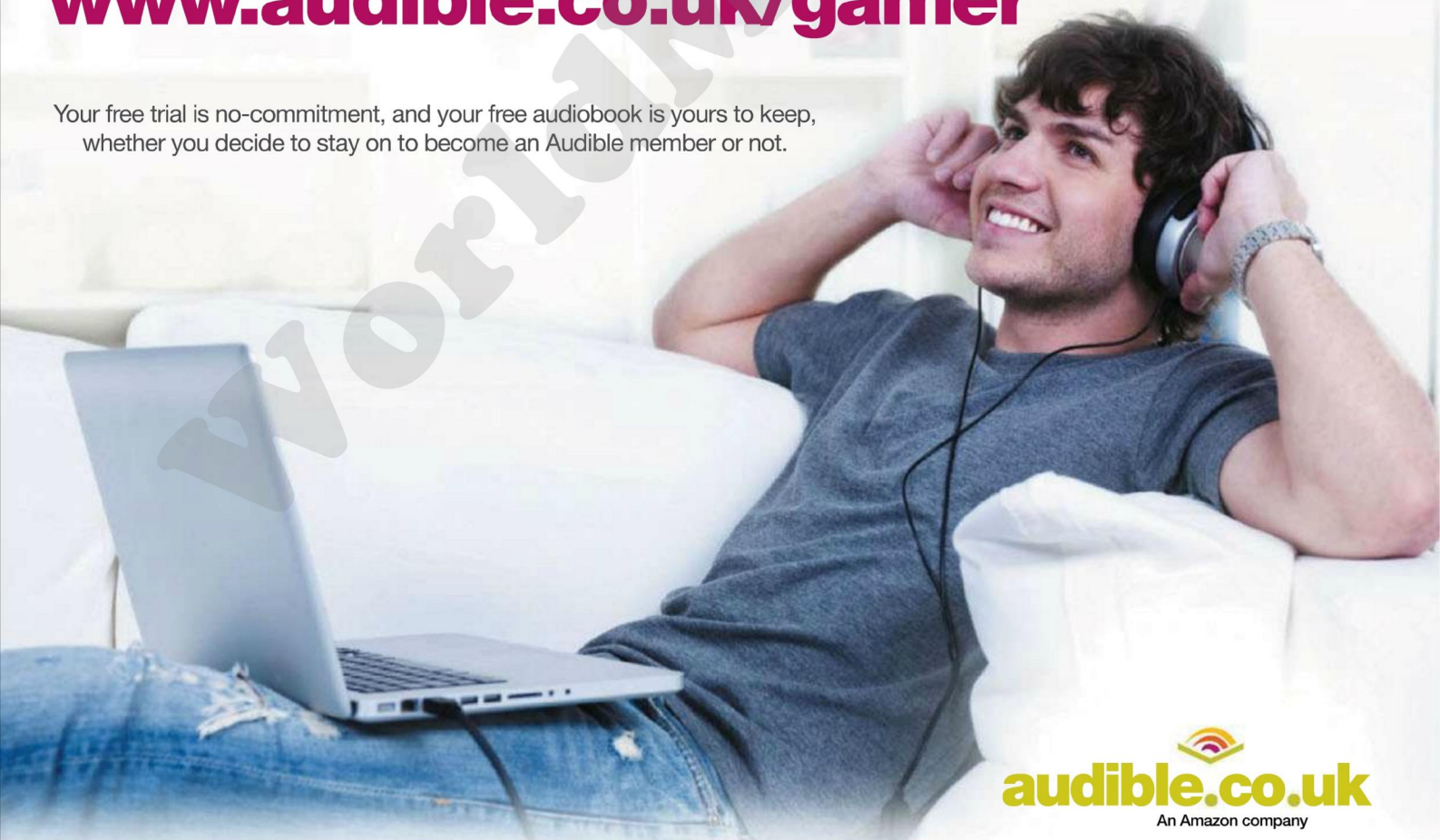


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LITTLE AND LESS

Sadism, betrayal and plotting; but now Tim's on paternity leave, let's talk about **A GAME OF THRONES: GENESIS**. By Dan Griliopolous

Need to know

What is it?

A strategy game set in George RR Martin's Westeros, before the period of the books.

Influenced by

The novels of the sadist George RR Martin

Play it on

2.2GHz, 2GB RAM, 256MB DX9 card

Alternatively

Age of Mythology, 90%

Copy protection

Steam

Based on the fascinatingly sadistic A Song of Ice and Fire novels by George RR Martin, *Game of Thrones* should make for a perfect strategy game. The books are purely about lethal plots, arrogant nobles fighting pointless wars, and the suffering populace of a world failing to face an undead threat coming with the long winter. And dragons. Having included all of that, how could *Genesis* fail?

Well, by not capturing that feel at all. The RTS element has a structure as traditional as *Age of Empires II*. The singleplayer campaign tracks, somewhat tediously, through the lightly-sketched history of Westeros. The missions are varied but plodding, where characters about as strong as paper bags follow arbitrary paths on 2D maps.

This isn't the majority of the game. That's House to House – the skirmish / multiplayer mode. The Houses (the leading families of the books, eg, Stark or – *splits* – Lannister) must raise prestige to win. This is gathered in a range of strange ways –

not having your bastard children revealed, not being humiliated by betrayal, or even by killing the most people – and it's this mode and only this mode that's worth playing. Once your prestige passes 100, you win.

There are two types of resource economy. Ally with towns or castles and you'll create merchants to bring you gold, to hire social agents or mercenaries. Meanwhile, peasants work on the fields to create food. Once you have an excess of food (a shortage is strangely not a problem) it can be used to raise armies, which are slightly more specialised, tougher mercenary units – pikemen, crossbowmen and the like.

Much and more

As players perform ill-defined aggressive actions, a ticker at the screen's top tells you how near you are to war. It's a nice idea, but not mechanically obvious.

Each house has a specialism and special unit. The Starks, for example, field tough commanders, fast footmen and direwolves. Despite this variety, combat is mostly messy

and the unit AI is poor.

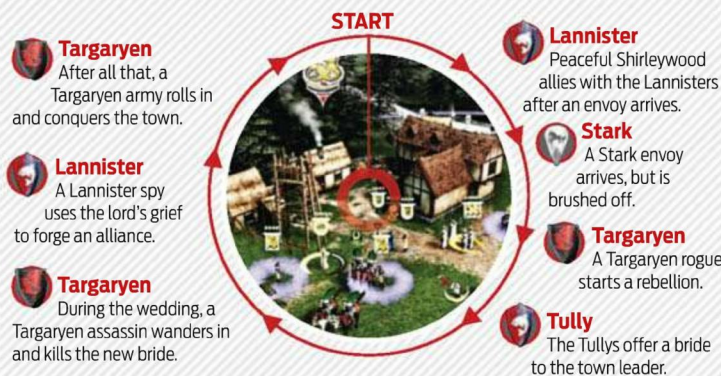
It's lucky, then, that the core of the game is subterfuge. Each player has agents, bought with gold, with a variety of talents. More abilities can be unlocked by experienced units (which can be bought, for a premium) or through another resource. These agents can be used to acquire territory, scout, nobble or protect other agents, and generally confuse the issue of who's winning.

The Spy can detect hidden enemy agents as long as he doesn't move, and detect traitor towns and agents by inspecting them. If he gets experience, he can take an enemy disguise and be upgraded, enabling him to sign secret agreements with the enemy's allies – so they'll join your side if it turns to war. The cheap Envoy makes agreements, the Noble Lady makes alliances unbreakable – until the Assassin kills her. The Rogue raises rebellions and buys loyalty, and the Guards protect important characters and arrest enemy characters – who can then be ransomed back. All of these tools are fun to use, but in larger levels the micromanagement swiftly becomes overwhelming, and it's not always clear whether what you're doing is relevant to your success.

As a singleplayer experience, this isn't great. It's messy, slow without being clear, graphically not cutting edge, and the loooooong campaign just isn't compelling enough. The skirmish mode would be fun, but all of these espionage tools are no use without a real person to use them on, which is what multiplayer's for. And, as we knew already, that's the only way to play the Game of Thrones. ■

The tale of a town

The circle of life in Westeros



"The Starks field fast footmen and direwolves"

◆ Expect to pay £29.99 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Focus Home Interactive ◆ Developer Cyanide ◆ Multiplayer Up to 8 ◆ Link agot-genesis.com

VERDICT

When you play the game of thrones, you win or you die. There is no middle ground. This... dies.

PC GAMER
62



CTRL-ALT-DEFEAT

The future takes a giant step back to the '90s in cyberpunk shooter **HARD RESET**. By **Richard Cobbett**

Need to know

What is it?

A cyberpunk paen to circle-strafing, rocket launchers and really big explosions.

Influenced by

Painkiller

Play it on

Quad-core CPU, 3GB RAM, 1GB 3D card

Alternatively

Bulletstorm, 80%

Copy protection

Steam

Bezoar isn't a city. It's an explosion with streets. Every plaza is piled high with toxic barrels, every kiosk and ATM wired so that a single overly-enthusiastic sneeze can spray arcs of lightning at anyone in sight.

Why? Because *Hard Reset* isn't just a reference to what you're expected to do to the army of killer robots infesting the city: it's what the game tries to do to shooter design itself. It's a back-to-basics FPS in a shiny modern engine, not so much throwing out such things as moral choices and fancy physics puzzles as declaring them officially irrelevant. It's you versus roughly seventy squillion enemies, hoping to save at least slightly more of your futuristic home than you blow up.

There's a bit more plot than that, but it's not worth worrying about.

Hard Reset's story bits, which mostly serve to give you something to look at while the next level loads, are a confusing, barely coherent mass of graphic-novel type scenes that fail miserably at introducing any of its characters, or even explaining why an army of machines is attacking a city named after a lump of hair dug out of the digestive system. Beyond 'shooting stuff', I honestly couldn't tell you what I was doing for most of it, right up to the point where *Hard Reset* just decides it's had enough and ends with nothing actually resolved.

Painstorm

Luckily, it's a much better shooter than storyteller. Members of the team worked on both *Bulletstorm* and *Painkiller*, and it shows. Weapons and environmental explosions have terrific weight to them, and enemies attack in hordes of whirling-blade

death machines instead of just a couple of tough guys at a time. You spend most of your time circle-strafing and running backwards: cover mostly exists to be blown away by a charging tank and scenery is every bit as deadly to you as the enemies. Ammo is plentiful (and recharges on its own if you run out), as is health. That doesn't mean you won't be seeing your own splattery death a lot, however, especially in multi-wave arena fights where you have to ration your pick-ups carefully to survive.

As good as all this feels, it doesn't take long to get repetitive. There are very few enemy types, and none of them require any more advanced tactics than dodging a charge or switching to a rocket launcher to hit a boss's brightly glowing weak-points. Bar a spectacularly hateful final boss, you feel like you've seen it all very early on... and actually will have before very long. On Normal difficulty, I polished off the campaign in a casual afternoon's play and was left with no incentive to replay it. There aren't any multiplayer modes, and you'll have all the weapons you actually want long before the end.

As a one-of-a-kind game, perhaps the nostalgia factor would be enough to compensate. Unfortunately for *Hard Reset*, it has company from both the original *Painkiller* and the balls-out cheer of *Bulletstorm*, with *Serious Sam 3* close on its tail. In comparison to any of them, its back-to-basics charm feels firmly in tech-demo territory – albeit really good tech, and with great combat for the short while it actually lasts. ■

The Department of Gratuitous Pyrotechnics

Keeping the streets unsafe for everyone



LASER FENCE

Sometimes shut off with buttons, sometimes with extreme prejudice. Chance of explosion: 50%

GIANT ROBOT

Like a normal robot, only bigger. Explosion is mandatory. Chance of explosion: 100%

CAR

Easily missed, but always full of delicious and volatile gellignite. Chance of explosion: 40%

ELECTRICAL TERMINAL

If it doesn't get hit by a bullet, it's a miracle. Chance of explosion: 75%

EMPTY CORNER

But what's around it? Oh, an exploding barrel. Fancy. Chance of explosion: 90%

"It's a back-to-basics FPS in a shiny modern engine"

◆ Expect to pay £23 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Flying Hog Software ◆ Developer In-house
◆ Multiplayer None ◆ Link www.hardresetgame.com

VERDICT

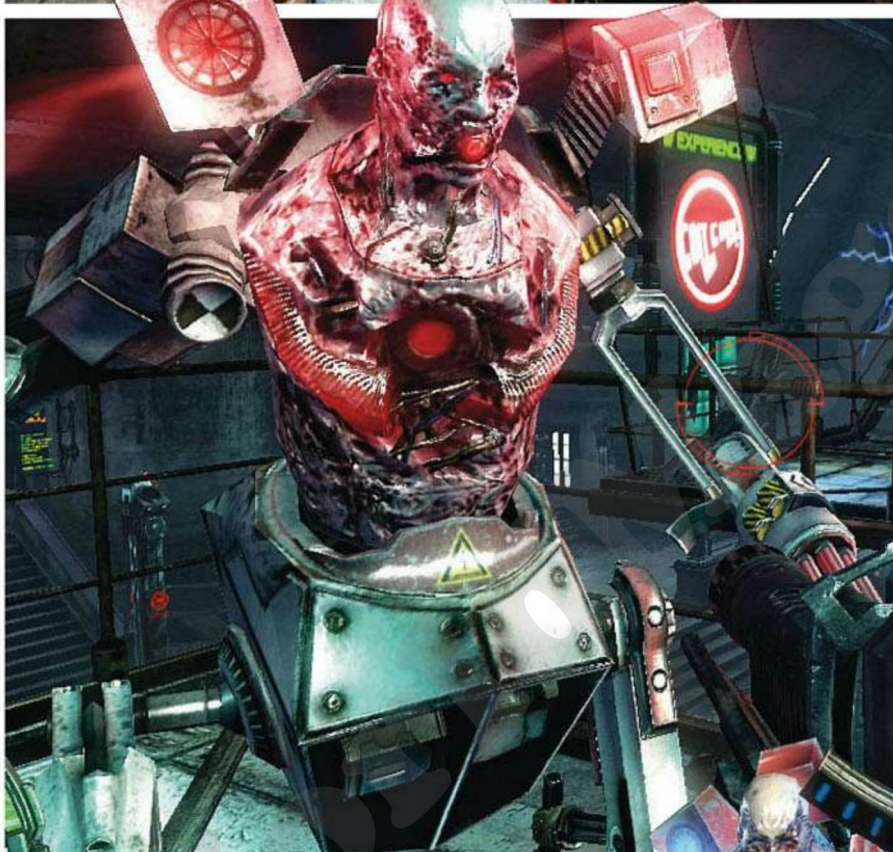
An explosive ride of a game, but limited long-term satisfaction, priced roughly £10 too high for its own good.

PC GAMER
58

There are at least three reasons not to fight here, all labelled EXPLOSIVE.



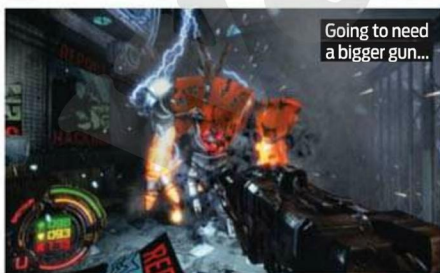
Yeah, I said *Tron Legacy* was shit. What are you going to do about it?



Hard Reset boasts some amazing scenery for a game where none of it matters.



Sometimes, your best weapon is a smile. Not here. Here, it's the shotgun.



Going to need a bigger gun...



No! Not the Cat Annoying Laser! You fiends!



Weaponised tap-dancing? You fiends!



BAD TRIP

Invest your money elsewhere: crime really doesn't pay in **CALL OF JUAREZ: THE CARTEL**. By Tom Senior

Need to know

What is it?

FPS about battling drug dealers in LA and Mexico.

Influenced by

The Club, turkey shoots

Play it on

Core 2 Duo 2GHz CPU, Nvidia 8800GT/ATI 3850, 1GB RAM, 8GB HDD

Alternatively

Bulletstorm, 80%

Copy protection

Steam

A gangster emerges from cover, points his guns in the wrong direction and sidles toward me like a drug-addled crab. How did this man even *survive* this long in a Mexican drug cartel? I shoot him the face and turn on his two-dozen equally dopey friends, tapping the fire button impassively until the assault ends. This is justice in Techland's vision of the modern Wild West. Brutal and boring.

Call of Juarez: The Cartel puts you in control of one of three corrupt, foul-mouthed law enforcement officers. There's the dual-wielding jerk, the shotgun jerk and the jerk who stands at the back with a rifle. All three roll together through each mission, eliminating hordes of heavily armed drug dealers and the occasional helicopter, earning points with every kill that can then be used to buy better weapons at the start of the next level.

You must protect the daughter of a former drugs official, a key witness in a drugs trial, by killing everyone she has ever witnessed and occasionally ferrying her to new safe houses in rubbish driving bits.

The previous *Call of Juarez* games were half-decent shooters set in the badlands of the Old West. They had heart. They had a grizzled Bible-quoting preacher and excellent revolvers, but all that has gone. The modern day setting is brainless, generic and devoid of personality. The engine is capable of throwing out environments of notable scale, but they're always painfully linear wide corridors full of pop-up drug fiends and pop-in textures.

There's some attempt at pacing. Sometimes you'll run into overwhelming fire and have to take it in turns to rush to prescribed cover locations, which is exactly as boring as it sounds. Occasionally you'll

breach and enter a locked room in slow motion, blasting mooks who wouldn't have stood a chance even if time was moving at an ordinary clip.

The most interesting addition by far is the secret missions each team member must try to complete for extra experience. These tasks are delivered by mobile phone, and inevitably involve picking something up while no one is looking. If a teammate sees you, they get the experience instead.

It's a great idea, designed to add extra spice to the three-player co-op, but the dull objectives and poor execution let the system down. Mobile calls come unbidden and slow you to a crawl so your horrible character can swear down the mouthpiece for a few minutes.

There's nothing worse than seeing that goddamn phone loom into view as you're throwing a grenade at a cluster of bad guys. Even as the fire pours in, your out-of-control character pushes the phone into his own face to read a text message, and then actually texts back as the world explodes around him.

The Cartel's finest feature is a mess. Everything else is merely bland, repetitive and dull. ■

VERDICT

Pathetic guns, horrible characters and stupid enemies. It'll take a loaded bong to get through this one.

PC GAMER
35

◆ Expect to pay £20 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Ubisoft ◆ Developer Techland
◆ Multiplayer Up to three players ◆ Link bit.ly/eQ5vbC

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29 practises falling over at the wrong moment.



Attacking moves are more fluid this year.



Rooney's face is more detailed. For better or for worse.



He can stay like that for hours.



Attackers put keepers under more pressure.

EXTRA TIME

A rush of pitch improvements brings **PES 2012** back from the brink. **By Tom Senior**

Need to know

What is it?

The 10th edition of the soccer sim, with improved attacking and a more fluid match engine.

Influenced by

FIFA 11, Real Madrid's forwards

Play it on

Core 2 Duo CPU, GeForce 7900GTX/Radeon X800 GFX card, 2GB RAM, 8GB HDD

Alternatively

FIFA 12

Copy protection

CD key

On the surface it looks like not much has changed in the yearly updated world of *Pro Evolution Soccer*, but a lack of big new tournaments or flashy features masks the huge work that's gone into improving the football itself.

After the rigmarole of picking a team (mostly unlicensed, so you get the real Manchester United, but Aston Villa are West Midlands Village) you're on the pitch, ready to guide your team to victory.

Attacking players have more of a pulse this year. Instead of tottering level with the ball carrier waiting to be marked out, they're far more inclined to take a run behind enemy lines, dashing down the wings and even making the occasional slanted run in the middle of the pitch.

Gone are the days when you'd stand outside the opposition's box with one foot on the ball, shouting at your men to sodding do something,

only to be kneecapped by the sliding boot of a defender moments later. If your men are starting to loiter, you can command one to start running with a quick point and click of the right stick (play with a joypad, people!). It's an essential move that bypasses occasional AI lethargy and gives you much more precise control.

But all that new attacking movement can leave defenders stuck in the mud. For the most part they're sensible, but their refusal to dive in for a necessary crunching tackle means that a pressing team can get away with too much. On one occasion a simple clearance from a corner reached my pacey young striker, Gabby Agbonlahor. I'd caught the opposition on the counterattack and Gabby had the entire pitch to run into. The two Liverpool central defenders had taken up sensible positions, and dutifully dashed in to sandwich my

lone striker as he powered towards the box. They ran alongside him for a full ten metres without delivering so much as a shifty elbow. I scored an easy goal when I should have ended up in the dirt at the halfway line.

No surprise, then, that matches in *PES 2012* tend to be high-scoring affairs, but it's forgivable given how much better the football feels this time around. Everything is faster and more precise. While *FIFA*'s trick stick has players performing ever more convoluted manoeuvres, *PES* is about passing and team movement. Matches are far more lively and competitive as a result.

It would be wrong to point to one big factor as the reason behind *PES*'s revival. It's the result of a number of incremental improvements on the pitch. Players are more responsive on the ball, a tricky attacker feels different to a lumbering defender, the animations are more convincing, the crowds noisier and attacking play is enormously improved.

PES still struggles to offer anything its monolithic competitor *FIFA* can't do with more polish, but *2012* is an incisive diagonal run in the right direction. If only the defenders were a little braver. ■

VERDICT

An overhaul of the match engine and lively attacking play bring *PES* back into contention, but don't expect much from the AI.

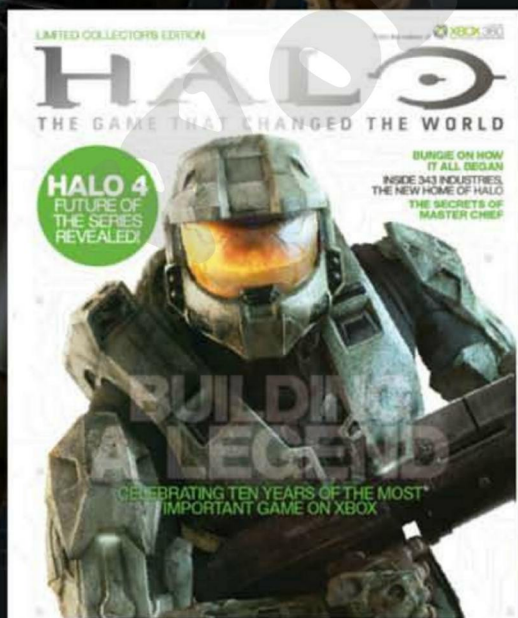
PC GAMER
84

◆ Expect to pay £30 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Konami ◆ Developer In-house
◆ Multiplayer 4 players online ◆ Link bit.ly/plxuPB

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TRAUMATIC

The little things are important in **RED ORCHESTRA 2: HEROES OF STALINGRAD**. By *Graham Smith*

Need to know

What is it?

Multiplayer shooter set on World War II's Russian front, where death is inevitable.

Influenced by

Battlefield 2

Play it on

2GHz+ CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 8800

Alternatively

Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway, 85%

Copy protection

Steam

Red Orchestra 2 is the best murder simulator I've ever played. It's not the best first-person shooter or multiplayer game, or even the best team-based multiplayer game. It's certainly not the best World War II game, and its singleplayer is the worst I've played in years. But in the killing, and in the being killed, *Red Orchestra 2* is a terrifying and satisfying experience.

Let's talk about you for a minute. You're a soldier in either Hitler or Stalin's army, and you're shit-scared. You've got your back against the wall in a room with one door, two windows and three walls, and you're peeking around a corner into the exposed core of a half-destroyed building. Every room could conceal an enemy soldier, and you've died a hundred times already, always from that one angle you didn't check.

Looking down through the rubble, you see an enemy soldier break from behind a wall. You aim and fire in a single motion. You've shot him and now he's dead. It's exactly like a million other games, but it feels nothing like any other game. It's the little things that make the difference,

such as the sound of your own breathing when you lifted the rifle to your face, and the way it bobbed slightly in your hands. It's in the mark on your enemy's chest where the bullet hit, and the way his blood spritzed from his back, marking that bullet's exit. It's in the way he fell, forced by some terrible weight. Sometimes, but not this time, it would be the way he clutches his stomach, yelling in Russian, or the way he fires his machinegun madly during his last few seconds of life.

At some point, the developers of *Red Orchestra 2* realised that if the primary interaction in your game is killing, then you should probably make the killing feel incredible. It's this attention to detail that turns an otherwise ordinary game, a slightly more realistic *Battlefield*, into something great, with Soviets fighting Nazis across mother Russia.

Take the game modes, for example. The most popular is Territory, in which one team starts in control of a map's capturable points and the enemy must take them. In this mode, reinforcements spawn every 20 seconds or so, and on maps designed to support 64 players

it does a fine job of focusing attention on the shifting frontline. But it did the same in *Battlefield 2*, where it was called Conquest mode. Countdown mode has similar attack/defend objectives, but players get just one life per round, and the teams swap sides midway. No one is currently playing it. The third mode is Firefight, a team deathmatch variant which is popular, but feels as if it's missing the point of *Red Orchestra*.

Touch of class

While the weapons feel remarkable, the classes that carry them are familiar. There's the Assault class, with a sub-machinegun; the Marksman, with a sniper rifle; the Rifleman and Elite Rifleman; and a few others. The few inventive classes, such as Squad Leaders and Commanders (see 'Follow the leader'), do little to change the flow of battle. Both roles have valuable abilities, but nobody follows orders on public servers.

Even tanks don't add much to the experience. They require a whole different set of skills to use well, and have lovingly detailed interiors, but they are an easily ignored nuisance on the few maps that actually include them. On any server I've ever joined, the one tank-only map is the moment in the war when everyone disappears to write letters home to their mothers.

Let's be clear: none of these things are bad, they're just not why *Red Orchestra* is great. Ignore how dull the idea of another World War II shooter sounds, and look to the experiences *RO2* provides. Again, it's the little things that have made me play it for 25 hours in a week.

It's creeping through the ruined buildings of Pavlov's House, one of the best maps, and jumping every time you see a piece of paper float through the air. It's listening to the footsteps echoing through the building, and freezing as you hear



"It's the little things that make me play it for 25 hours a week"



Must. Resist. Tickling. Ally.



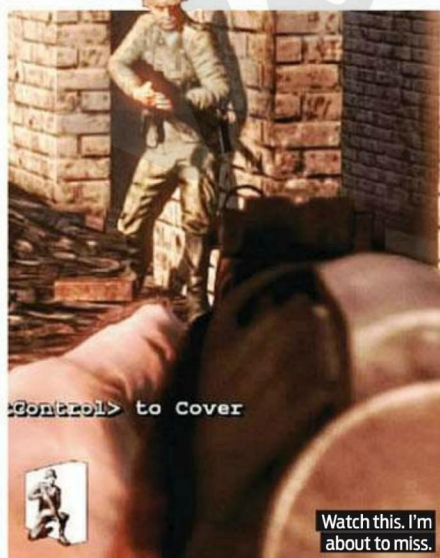
Tanks are always kissing behind the bike shed.



Single tanks get angry and resentful.



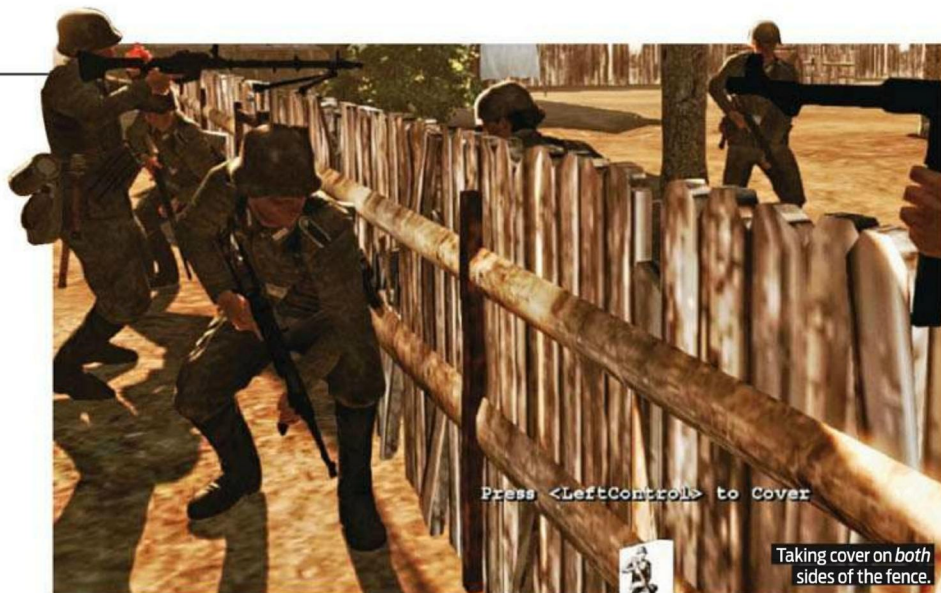
Artillery strikes destroy buildings as rounds progress.



Watch this. I'm about to miss.



Being hit could reduce this guy to a bloody smear.





creaking on the stairs. It's the time I rounded a corner to come face to face with a Nazi holding a grenade above his head, bayoneted him in the stomach, and then dived down some stairs to escape the blast. It's the thrill of sprinting across an open field, enemy machinegun fire whizzing all around you.

Death in *RO2* is so sudden and violent that you're constantly on edge, an experience that's exacerbated by all the little pieces of information the game is keeping from you.

Realistically broken

Firstly, at a distance there's no easy, instant way to tell if a soldier is on your side. The uniforms are distinct, but not the fluorescent green cycling jackets you need on a smoky battlefield. If you're close to someone, looking at them, and they're on your side, their name will appear, but often you don't have that kind of time.

Secondly, there's no instant kill confirmation. You'll be fighting across the ruined tenements on the wonderful Pavlov's House map, and you'll spot a head in a window across the street. From the shape of the helmet, you'll infer that it's an enemy and fire. The head will disappear from view. Are they dead? Did you miss? Are they wounded and bandaging themselves? Is it safe to move on? You can only hope.

Wherever it can, *RO2* makes murky what other games want to be clear. There's no ammo display on the HUD; you have to check the barrel for a rough estimate, or count your own shots. Realism mode, which is activated on roughly half of the servers currently running, removes certainty altogether by taking out friendly names, kill confirmations and the radar. It doesn't make a huge difference, but I had more fun in non-realism mode.

Lastly, the heart-munching adrenaline you feel in front of your PC is mirrored in the soldier you're controlling. When you're stood at a window and bullets start to chip against the frame, all the colour drains from the screen, the world blurs, and your aim becomes worse than a drunk teenager in a nightclub bathroom. You need to get out of there to catch your breath, like the person who enters the bathroom after the teenager. It's a smart way to stop camping.

All this attention to detail hasn't prevented the game from being miserably broken. Connecting to a server frequently plops me on to a team selection screen where the buttons don't work. The server browser refreshes only once, meaning I have to restart the game to try again. If I do successfully connect to a server, the bugs don't stop. Sometimes when I die, I'm unable to re-spawn until I re-select

my class. The XP system, which is supposed to reward you with new weapons, is completely broken, and the Steam achievements system will often reward you for things you haven't done. At least once every two hours, on two different PCs, the game crashed entirely.

It's like buying a beautiful dining table from eBay, having your editor help you carry it up two flights of stairs, and then discovering it has Death Watch Beetles pupating inside it. Tripwire say they are aware of the issues, and I'm confident they'll fix them, but right now it makes playing a chore.

Less likely to be fixed any time soon are the German and Soviet singleplayer 'campaigns', which amount to nothing more than multiplayer matches with bots, connected by brief, animated history lessons. They would be fine, but the bot AI is more stupid than the larvae tunnelling under my dinner plates.

Let's make a list, then. The AI soldiers are blind, and will run directly past soldiers on the enemy team without firing. They're crippling indecisive, and will leap in and out of the same window over and over. If an enemy is close enough, he'll try to melee you, but if you run backwards, he'll chase you interminably and never fire.

I've seen machinegunners set up with their backs to the enemy. I've seen machinegunners set up on top of kitchen cabinets, facing a wall. I've seen soldiers run in infinite circles, unable to navigate a corner. I've seen enemy tanks drive forever into walls, and crash into the front of me, but never fire.

The singleplayer option appears at the top of the main menu, and to newcomers who aren't familiar with *Red Orchestra* it provides a terrible introduction. It should not have been released. Ignore it.

But don't ignore the game. By perfecting a lot of tiny, gruesome details, its developers have created an experience where killing a man is as satisfying as getting a tetris, and when I close my eyes I'm still firing rifles in my head. ■

"Killing a man is as satisfying as getting a tetris"

VERDICT

Satisfying, suspenseful multiplayer is more than the sum of its parts, but marred by bugs. Ignore the awful singleplayer.

PC GAMER
78

WORLD CLASS

A full-featured PC edition puts **FIFA 12** strides ahead of its competition. **By Tom Senior**

Need to know

What is it?

Football sim with improved physics and collision engine, and revamped defence.

Influenced by

PES 2010, Italian defence

Play it on

Core 2 Duo 2.4GHz CPU, GeForce 7800/Radeon HD 6620, 2GB RAM, 6GB HDD

Alternatively

PES 2012, 84%

Copy protection

Origin



There are two instances in which you're likely to see a footballer somersault on the pitch. The first is if he's scored a goal and communicates his joy through the medium of gymnastics, the second is if his legs have just been taken out by a defender and he communicates that he no longer has the ball through the medium of flying and screaming. Both instances are simulated spectacularly in *FIFA 12*.

For the first time in many seasons, this year's edition of *FIFA* on PC is identical to its console cousins – the same engine, animations and online modes that console players have come to expect, as well as the new defensive controls and an 'Impact Engine' designed to render player collisions with devastating accuracy.

The Impact Engine is great, mostly. When players collide, either in a tackle or a shoulder-to-shoulder

tussle for the ball, the procedural physics system will take into account both players' physiques and simulate the precise result. In big tackles, this means sprawling falls, in possession battles it leads to some slightly cuddly wrestling, and in mismatches the smaller man is comically flattened.

It simulates the physicality of the sport with more realism than any other football game before it, but can occasionally be a bit too exuberant. Players off the ball who accidentally cross paths can find themselves locked in a panicky tumble of limbs. Watching footballers fall over is inherently funny, though, and the layer of unpredictability the Impact Engine adds is well worth the occasional mad moment.

The defensive overhaul is more controversial. Defenders can now 'jockey' attacking players, strafing in front of them with a wide stance waiting for the right moment to

tackle. Most defensive encounters are about standing off the opponent, shielding areas of the pitch and blocking sneaky through balls. This is what defending is like in real football, of course, but it's a change of pace from the close harassment and tackles of *FIFA*'s previous years.

This will likely prove unpopular with some players, but if you're looking for an accurate simulation of the sometimes ponderous ebb and flow of a real football match, then *FIFA 12* comes close. Occasionally teams will mark each other into oblivion, and there will be nil-nil draws – but that's the game, and breaking through and scoring that elusive goal can feel more difficult than ever in the face of an organised and patient defence.

Until now, football games have simulated a kind of hyper-football, packed full of overhead kicks, snaking runs and raking tackles. *FIFA 12* makes the brave decision to slow the game down and bring the action closer to the real sport.

It's all the more annoying, then, to come across the small but infuriating problems that have dogged *FIFA* for years. A running player can be so happy to be selected that they drop off the pace – a calamity if they're shadowing a flying striker on the way into the box. Player selection in general can still be a bit of a gamble, and free kicks and crossing can feel like a dark art.

But on the whole, it's superb. The sensation of motion and momentum when a team breaks is incredible, and *FIFA* taps into the strange cocktail of agonising frustration and explosive joy that is football, and does it better

Scoregasm

You've scored a goal! It's time to embarrass yourself



"The sensation of motion and momentum is incredible"

◆ Expect to pay £30 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Electronic Arts ◆ Developer EA Sports
◆ Multiplayer 2-4 local, up to 22 online ◆ Link www.ea.com/uk/fifa12

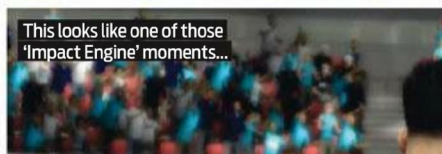
VERDICT

Spectacular player collisions and tackles, and a far more realistic pace make *FIFA 12* the best football sim yet.

PC GAMER
90



Time to buy your striker a new pair of glasses.



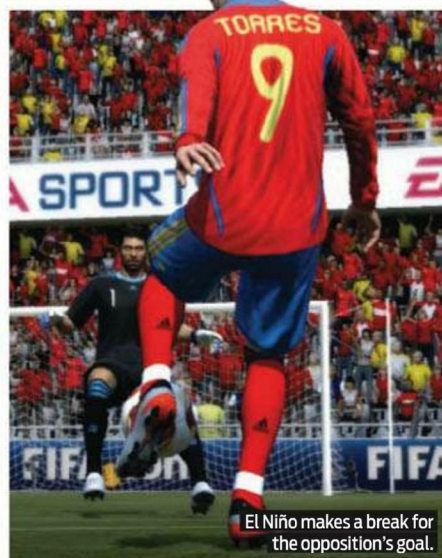
This looks like one of those 'Impact Engine' moments...



Improvements in FIFA 12 include more realistic defending.



There's plenty of 'goal mouth action' in FIFA 12.



El Niño makes a break for the opposition's goal.

ROUNDABOUT

It's all change for **TRACKMANIA 2: CANYON** – except for all the bits as brilliant and broken as before. *By Duncan Harris*

Need to know

What is it?

Time-trial arcade racer with genre-defining user-generated content component.

Influenced by

Stunt Car Racer, stunts

Play it on

1.5GHz CPU, Pixel Shader 2, 1GB RAM

Alternatively

Driver: San Francisco, 80%

Copy protection

Internet connection

After all this time, still nothing compares to that opening sprint. One car, purring on the starting block, becomes a swarm of 20 when the countdown hits zero. Latticed tyre tracks. Wheels clipping through bumpers clipping through bonnets. A turn is coming: easy left into easy right, then an exit into a suicidal drop. Three degrees off and you'll fluff the angle for the jump at the end. But you've trained for this – and so, as the others make their mistakes, you glide dead-bang into the tunnel. Into the mouth of a mountain.

Come to mention it, nothing really compares to the middle of a *TrackMania* race, either, when everyone's thinking that, yes, *this* is the lap they get it right. Or indeed

the end, when some naughty terrain ensures that no one crosses the finish line forwards, horizontal, or at the same altitude as their windscreen.

If you've played the series before, you'll know this isn't quite how it works. A typical 'race' doesn't end at the finish, but rather somewhere in the melee of often disastrous, constantly resetting, occasionally awesome time trial attempts.

Everyone in a session races with and around one another – *through* one another – but only ever against the clock. They learn from their own mistakes, and from others that send cars bouncing off the approaching scenery. And, boy, do they bounce.

Playing the game accounts for one third of *TrackMania*. The other parts are creating (tracks, cars, music, minigames, general Eurotrash

oddness) and sharing (via in-game personal storefronts, forums, YouTube, wherever). It's been this way for eight years now, and the numbers involved are *massive*. Today, however, the one that really matters is the creating.

What does it mean when a game that's been updated plenty of times already decides to call itself a sequel? If you ask Nadeo, it means the start of a new adventure. Season two, episode one. *TrackMania 2: Canyon* includes just a single terrain type, a single car/handling model, and a single 'pure' racing mode. No platforms or puzzles. No cities, islands, or stadium. The changes are seemingly few, but in a game of degrees and milliseconds they can feel huge.

The handling is no longer that of a toy racer. The new car is heavier, throatier, and it drifts big-time. Unlike the first game's vehicles, it has no air-brake. That means greater surrender to the science that kicks in when, after all that panicked steering, you finally hit a jump. The tracks feel more natural, the cars animal. Is it better? Try 'different', like *Stunt Car Racer* meets *Daytona*.

Desert heart

The Canyon, for a place made of pluggable building blocks, is magnificent. A Scalextric of the gods: bored into mountains, soaring over lakes, twisting against rhyme, reason, and gravity beneath a Sega-blue sky. And the light: baked into the rock, lost in the cracks, gluing it all together and bringing it to life. It's a static environment, too, which means that it's all precalculated by the track editor. Result: you don't need godlike hardware to play it, even in the new splitscreen mode.

As you can tell, I get rather high on *TrackMania*. It appeals to my inner geek with all its outward-facing technology. If I want to take a screenshot, I can spend hours on the ▶

Auto modellista

The best mods already released for *TrackMania 2*

There was a time you could import just about any *TM* car into *TM2*, but that was another life. A *beta* life. Here's a sample of what you can download now.



Melling Hellcat by Bin
One of the very first 3D car models for *TM2: Canyon*, designed to be the fastest street-legal car in the world.



White Rock by CoastKid
The first noteworthy environment mod. Bleached cliffs respond beautifully to the new game's lighting system.



Suzuki Escudo by -Lr-SadHik
Damage and detachable parts are the chief differential in these *TM2* models, though there have been a few teething troubles.



LEGO by HawkGer
Apply these texture packs in the track editor by Ctrl-clicking when you start or open a map. 'Very Nice' settings advised.



MikuRacing by DarkDragonESP
There's no shortage of custom skins for the default Canyon car, so it's just as well the model is so sexy. This one makes it sexier.

**"Is it better?
Try 'different',
like *Stunt Car
Racer* meets
Daytona"**



They say jump, you say, "HOW high!?"



To quote *Deus Ex*: "You're chasing ghosts again."



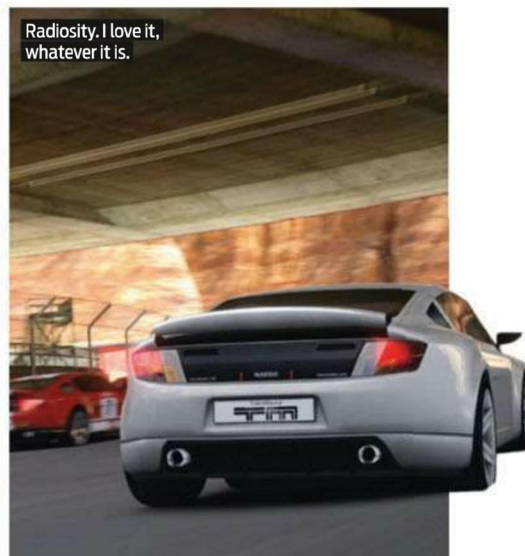
If HR Giger played *TrackMania*. Which is doubtful.



Not pictured: Two Illinois Nazis. "I've always loved you."



Discover what happened to Thelma and Louise after the cut to credits.

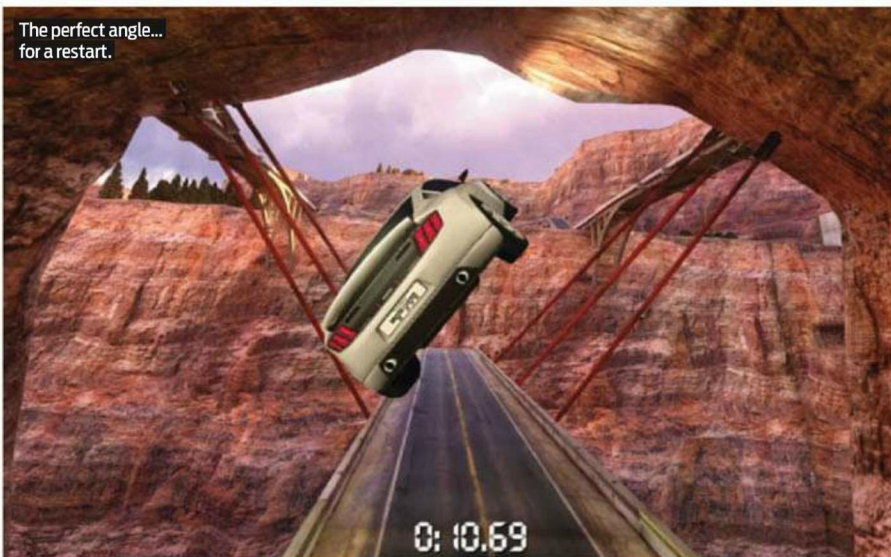


Radiosity. I love it, whatever it is.

Thank you, tiny danger sign.
I hadn't realised.



The perfect angle...
for a restart.



Ooh, that lighting.



The red paint makes it go faster.



The 'Shininess' slider, favoured
by early Xbox 360 developers.



I must write that name down
somewhere. Mania... what is it?



Not pictured: Donald Pleasance
stroking a white cat.



camera angle alone, or on adjusting the replay timeline of every car. Then I can impose – heavens – 100x antialiasing on the scene. I can pretend to know what ‘GPU/CPU synchro’ really means. I can take longer making a movie about driving in circles than it took to make Inception. I can build and paint cars and then make myself some Planets, the game’s new virtual currency. I can build a casino to waste them in, or a bank to lend them to someone else. And a digital bailiff to go smash that person’s fingers? Probably! I can – which is to say I *could* – script all kinds of marvellous things. If only someone would show me how.

Ah yes, the comedown. Being a ‘community-driven’ game by a studio so small it could barely populate a race, *TM2* has no manual. Not quite, anyway. Not yet. Instead it has a wiki, designed to silence the abject what-the-fuckery from newcomers on the forums – but it raises more questions than it answers. Grilled about the lack of documentation, a studio spokesman posted: “No one at Nadeo knows every feature of the game. We are about twenty people, adding sometimes more than five or six features a day (like keyboard shortcuts, buttons, player page options, new dialogue boxes, maniahome...). I don’t know a single thing about the Media Tracker, and nobody else than me knows the whereabouts of the ManiaScript.”

This is the candour people love about Nadeo – even when, as happened recently, a power cut in France made most of the game temporarily unplayable. The angry and confused were then told by its second-line support people, the community elders themselves, that they should wait in silence or discover the rest of the game. Build a car, edit a replay, or toy with the slightly-improved track editor. Which is fine if you’re a veteran, or have a decent grasp on the game’s sprawl of user-developed content.

But what if you don’t? Sure, the track editor is simple in principle, but it can seem anything but when nothing you select or do conjures a tooltip, warning, or log entry of any kind. It gives you the right number of tools and blocks to ‘get it’ quickly, then get inventive and build tracks

A picture says a thousand words

A quick guide to TrackMania’s confusing interface



like the official ones. But it’s far from painless when it fails to identify what you’re trying to do (drive a road through a cliff, maybe), or even hazard a guess. An entire layer of things we take for granted is missing from this toolset, requiring players follow an online paper trail of variously handy tutorials.

Taken for a ride

Part of the problem is that Nadeo are so active in their community – married to it, effectively – that they think the game is spoken for. A major change as to how official time trials work, for instance – you have to get the gold medal time in practice first, then wait five minutes between attempts – was left a mystery for new players. Also, as with older games in the series, large portions of its ‘interface’ are just jumps to websites and forums. Others might prefer the term: ‘massive bloody holes where the user interface should be’.

Don’t get me wrong: *TrackMania 2* is a beautiful, heart-stopping, narcotic racing game. Its readiness to just sit there as operating system furniture, idling in the background before roaring to the fore, is a credit both to its engine and its design. To the PC, no less. Better still is how it has embraced different control schemes – the drift mechanics favour braking with Ctrl, or tweaking the deadzone on a 360 pad – while keeping the playing field level. And, for all that will be said about the

changes to the handling, there’s always *TrackMania United Forever*. The *TM* community is huge, and no stranger to divided loyalties. Why be frightened of change?

I’ve built tracks and made ‘paks’. I could tell you just what speed of footage creates just what kind of motion blur, and the advantage of using a Hermite-interpolated custom camera. I am a proud TrackManiac. But this game is not for everyone, and I’ll even go one further: after all this time – with the name of one of the world’s biggest publishers splashed across cars and tracks – I’m not sure it’s enough.

Maybe Nadeo have some strange Peter Pan complex. Maybe Ubisoft have some strange ‘what the hell have we gotten ourselves into?’ complex. Whatever the reason, *TrackMania* should have been ready at launch. Obviously there’s a whole lot more to come, but basics like the interface should have been immaculate, or at the very least presentable. It should have had tutorials, pop-ups, tooltips – the works – springing from every mode and button, not sitting on someone’s esoteric fan site. It should have been bug-free and user-friendly, yet its editors are quirky at best. It should be conquering the world. ■

VERDICT

Almost everything you’d want of a *TrackMania*, but as a *TrackMania 2* it leaves a lot to be desired, and hopefully fixed.

PC GAMER
83

“An entire layer of things we take for granted is missing”

CLANDESTINY

Shogun 2 extension **RISE OF THE SAMURAI** is as seductive as a rank six Shirabyoshi. **By Tim Stone**

Need to know

What is it?

A plump add-on that shifts *Shogun 2* from the 16th to the 12th century

Influenced by

The Tale of the Heike

Play it on

i5 CPU, 4GB RAM, 1GB 3D card

Alternatively

Sengoku, 71%

Copy protection

Steam

Should a *Total War: Shogun 2* supplement centred on the Genpei War of 1180-1185 feature a comprehensive selection of period units? Before you answer with an eager 'Hail' bear in mind that the Minamoto clan won the pivotal Battle of Kurikara with the aid of stampeding oxen.

There are no war cows in *Rise of the Samurai*, in fact this expansion is free of gimmicky bullocks/bollocks of all kinds. What you get for your very reasonable six quid is a cartload of new content that leaves *Shogun 2* feeling sushi-fresh.

At the heart of the transformation is a corker of a campaign involving six pleasingly distinct and enticingly

unfamiliar playable clans (see Pushy Bushi). Vying for control of a re-regionalised Japan map, these clans have their origins in three different families, meaning you always start out with one powerful ally nearby. The blood ties between you aren't indestructible, but the relationship usually lasts long enough to give those early years of expansion a comforting co-op feel.

If sister clans sent the occasional "Prepare yourself. I'm about to attack those swines in the east!" missive, and were a bit more attentive when it came to mutual defence, that feeling of companionship would have been even stronger. On a couple of occasions I've watched my empire crumble before my eyes while sizeable allied armies in neighbouring provinces sat around gassing on their camping stools.

Backdated

On the battlefield those armies look a lot more rustic and realistic than their base-game equivalents. The 400-year rewind brings a slightly simpler unit mix and far less fancy metal armour and flamboyant pageantry. Ashigaru and matchlock units are out. Cavalry is rarer. Formations are smaller and airier.

As the title of this supplement suggests, versatile bow-and-katana-armed foot samurai are the new skirmish stars. The only units capable of poaching their limelight are the knots of club-wielding Tetsubo monks and the white-faced, warhorse-spurring Onna Bushi heroines.

Women contribute to the war effort as sly Shirabyoshi, too. These traditional entertainers use poetry, dance, and, presumably, cuddling [Tim, we really need to have a chat - Biology Ed] to persuade enemy generals to defect and friendly ones

to stay loyal. Picture how crestfallen The Creative Assembly's cutscene team must have been on being told agent animations wouldn't feature in this expansion.

Shirabyoshi share the agent mess room with Metsuke-like Junsatsushi, the Ninja-esque Monomi, and the rabble-rousing Sou. None of these strat-map wanderers are radically different from their *Shogun 2* prototypes, but there are enough variations to encourage fresh approaches. Currently I'm playing as the well-heeled Hiraizumi and doing most of my conquering bloodlessly via the Junsatsushi 'switch allegiance' ability. First the agent spends a few turns passively influencing the target region, then a bulging carrier-bag of cash is handed over, and - bingo - the region usually switches sides. It's a very effective tactic. Perhaps *too* effective.

New agents are hired through such new structures as the barter house. To unlock these, *Rise of the Samurai*-specific arts trees must be climbed. Don't let anyone tell you this DLC is a lazy cash-in. Creative Assembly have thoroughly Genpei-fied almost every aspect of the game.

One of the few areas that hasn't felt the wind of change is the historical battle folder. Anegawa, the one previously unseen scrap, is a Sengoku-era affair.

Crawley's finest are already hinting that they've more *Shogun 2* adjuncts up their voluminous kimono sleeves. If the coming packs are as full-featured, historically sensitive, and as transformative as *Rise of the Samurai*, then hang onto your Hattoris, we're in for a treat. ■

Pushy Bushi?

What your favourite faction says about you



Kamakura Minamoto

You're kind. You like your enemy to fight in the shade (of thousands of arrows).



Kiso Minamoto

You're so impatient you've probably already skipped onto the next... Hey! Wait!



Kubota Fujiwara

You enjoy poetry, study, and watching warriors-monks make unholy foes holey.



Hiraizumi Fujiwara

You're sly and greedy. You'd rather bribe and tax your way to victory than fight.



Yashima Taira

Mercantilism and the sea are in your blood. Consult a doctor as soon as possible.



Fukuhara Taira

You enjoy bellowing "We are the Fukuhara and we've come to Fukuver!"

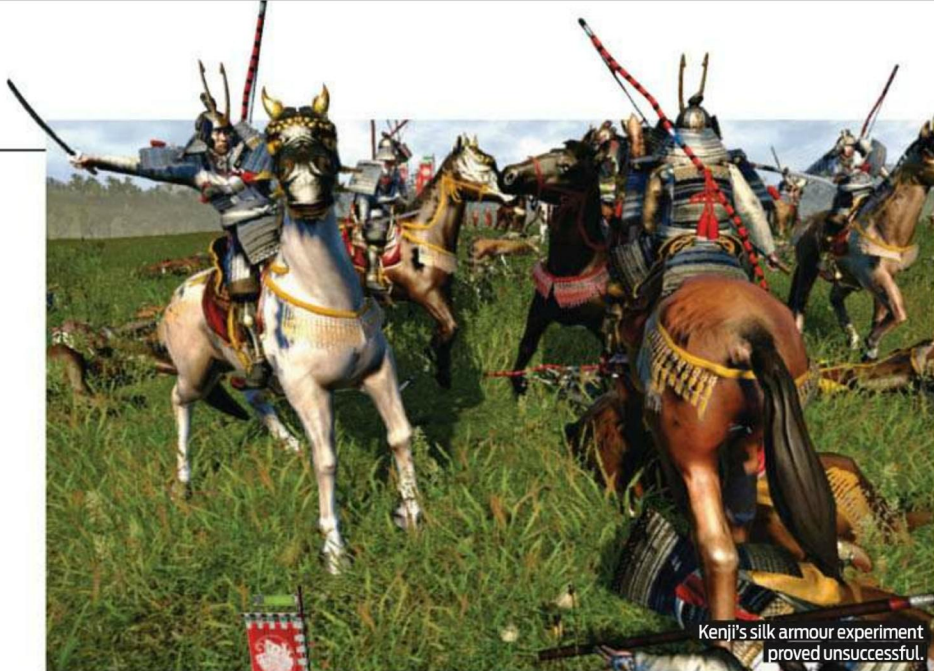
"Bow-and-katana armed samurai are the new stars"

◆ **Expect to pay** £6 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Sega ◆ **Developer** The Creative Assembly
◆ **Multiplayer** 2-8 players ◆ **Link** www.totalwar.com/shogun2

VERDICT

A generous, history-respecting rethink that adds weeks of fun to one of 2011's finest strategy titles.

PC GAMER
86



Kenji's silk armour experiment proved unsuccessful.



The map is prettier than ever and seems gentler on GPUs.



Religion is out. Now family influence is the thing.

The Europe of the 1180s was equally stabby.



No No-Dachi doesn't mean no stupidly large swords.



Does her father know?



'A man without sandals is a man without fear' Old Buddhist claptrap.



Clouds and a man
in a cap. GOLF!



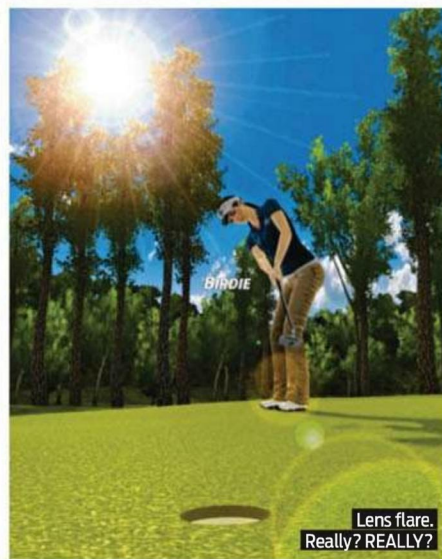
The backscratching
minigame is excellent.



Altogether now: ooh!



Please stop looking at this
screen and give me £15.



Lens flare.
Really? REALLY?

SHAFTED

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 12: THE MASTERS is a good game spoiled. *By Craig Pearson*

Need to know

What is it?

Golf sim with career progression, 16 courses and a whole lot of balls.

Influenced by

Tiger Woods Online

Play it on

1.5GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, Nvidia 6600/ATI Radeon x800

Alternatively

CustomPlay Golf 2010, 70%

Copy protection

Always-on internet connection

The game loads up and *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters* informs me that I can now purchase *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters*. Is this Inception-like advertising an evil way of getting confused customers to buy infinite copies, or just endemic of the laziness behind EA's latest golf-sim update?

It's a bit of both. This is an offline version of EA's *Tiger Woods Online* game, built using the browser-friendly Unity engine, which enables players to compete in the Masters tournament and exhibition matches without the fear of slicing it in front of people. But it still hooks into the subscription-based *Tiger Woods Online*, and I don't think I've ever played a clumsier attempt to integrate offline and online.

I was contentedly chipping my way to a par in a Master's game (the golf is still decent, if unchanged since *TGO* launched in 2010) when I was warned

I had ten minutes to save or lose my progress. I ignored it, assuming it was a general message to the entire server, as I was playing offline. The same pop-up appeared at five and two minutes before stopping the game and kicking me back to the desktop. When I tried to return to my offline game it wouldn't allow me access.

When *Tour 12* did grudgingly allow reconnection, I poked around online and discovered something sickening: this game doesn't even have a dedicated online mode. It has a three month's membership to *Tiger Woods PGA Tour Online*, after which you'll have to pay either £3 a month or £25 per year. That's on top of the £30 this glorified demo costs in the first place.

Yet without that membership you'll feel hard done by. Even if it is ugly, easy to play, and attempting to drain your wallet every second, at

least there are a good number of online competitions to triple-click your way through. Are they worth the subscription cost? Don't be silly: this is golf. Actually, this is *old* golf: an old game, repackaged without a good going-over by the greenskeepers. Ratty, tattered, and begging for money from the first time it loads up. They're selling you half a round and charging you more when you get to the ninth.

There might be a good model for a subscription-based golf game out there, but even when this was free-to-play the cost was too high. Now that it's saddled with a pricetag, the bare minimum of polish and one new course, I'm not even sure just telling you to avoid it is enough. As it stands, EA are already giving refunds to people who feel ripped off by what they bought.

The publishers hoped to use the connectivity of the PC to fill their pockets, but in the end it was that connectivity that brought forums and websites together to demand they do better. I can only get behind those dissatisfied customers.

Don't let EA get away with this. Don't buy it, and tell them this isn't good enough. ■

VERDICT

A Trojan horse for EA's subscription golf game, this is an insulting and sickening grab at PC gamers' wallets.

PC GAMER
15

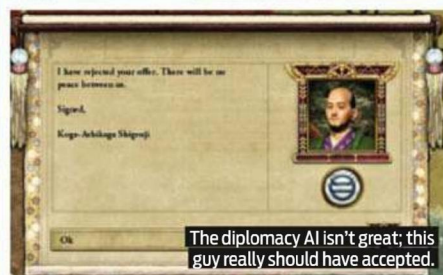
◆ Expect to pay £30 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher EA Sports ◆ Developer In-house
◆ Multiplayer 4-player rounds, multiplayer tournaments ◆ Link tigerwoodsonline.ea.com

Don't settle for less
than the **full 360**



VISIT
WWW.OXM.CO.UK





ALSO RAN

On your honour, you will enjoy the grand strategy of **SENGOKU**. By Dan Griliopolous

Need to know

What is it?

Strategy and warfare in feudal Japan.

Influenced by

Shogun, Europa Universalis

Play it on

2.4GHz CPU, 2GB RAM, Nvidia 8800 or ATI x1900

Alternatively

Total War: Shogun 2, 92%

Copy protection

Registration code, honour

I'm doing well. I'm a mean son of a Bitchu, but my courtiers are too shit-scared of me to rebel. They scheme endlessly, but my Master of the Guard penetrates their plots with ease. I just wait for them to garner enough support, then expose them to destroy their honour, and order the powerful ones to kill themselves.

I won't be Shogun – my territory is too small and my victories similarly tiny – but my four wives mean I've produced enough offspring that one of my children might be. If someone else doesn't get there first.

Sengoku is a feudal conquest sim set in the Sengoku period of Japan – the same era as *Shogun: Total War*. You can start as almost any lord, ranging from greats like the Uesugi and Hotokawa clans, to the most minor lord isolated far off Japan's coast with responsibility to a great chain of lieges and about as much chance of becoming Shogun as Jimmy Saville.

What the game doesn't tell you is... well, a lot. You're told you need to own 50% of the country to be Shogun, but Paradox seem to have eschewed the oft-derided tutorial for an in-game help system, which explains the interface as you click on it without revealing much of the core mechanics. A brave/foolhardy choice that will lose them a lot of impatient players. What are we meant to do, read Sun Tzu?

For example: honour is one of the key concepts, built up slowly through such actions as the assignment of titles, donating money to the Emperor, and religious observance. If it drops too low, your vassals rebel or plot. It's like a band where the lead singer has been an arsehole once too often. I had half my home territory rise up and form a new state because my honour was too low from going to war. But the game doesn't tell you what constitutes 'low' honour, or

how many other hidden mechanics are at work, and it's not always clear what the honour cost of an action is.

Both you and the AI can take part in plots, scheming against your enemies, allies and overlords – and they against you. One character selects the target, then invites other players to join in. When it works, it's spectacular. All the tools of medieval Japan are at hand to encourage plotting: hostage swaps, ninjas to undermine or assassinate, split inheritances and so on.

Beyond this, the diplomacy system is lightweight: *Sengoku* is a little more stripped down than Paradox's other dynastic titles. There's no tech tree, for example. Combat is equally rudimentary, consisting of at most three types of unit (spearmen, cavalry or primitive gunmen), and numbers ticking down according to defences and location. The largest army normally wins.

The simple building system is slow and expensive, often taking years, and enemy ninjas can destroy guilds or religious locations with ease. Despite this, the actual map of Japan is easily the best thing in the game, packing in more easily-digestible information than an edible library. ■

VERDICT

The first few times I tried *Sengoku*, I was lost, but the more I played this game, the more I enjoyed it.

PC GAMER
71

◆ Expect to pay £24.99 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Paradox ◆ Developer In-house
◆ Multiplayer Up to 32 ◆ Link www.paradoxplaza.com

The votes are in and counted, the winners have been announced



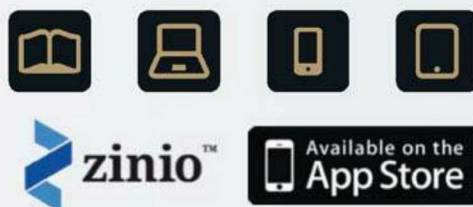
Win your personalised wish-list of tech goodies from a selection of T3 Gadget Award 2011 winners and nominees

Go to www.t3.com/awards for details of how to enter



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HEAVENLY BODIES

Discover why **UNIVERSE SANDBOX** is the only physics simulator that matters. *By Duncan Geere*

Need to know

What is it?

A physics toolkit built around orbital dynamics.

Influenced by

Encarta 96's orbit simulator

Play it on

1.5GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, DX9 video card

Alternatively

Astrograv, Orbiter

Copy protection

Steam

Judging *Universe Sandbox* as a *game* seems a little unfair. There are no bosses, no buffs or power-ups, no levelling-up system, and no objective. It's simply a physics sandbox that focuses on doing one thing right: gravity.

The premise is simple. You put rocks in space, set various physical properties such as velocity, mass and density, then watch them whizz about while cackling with glee at your power over the universe. If you get it right, their orbit carves a graceful arc across the empty darkness of space.

What's more fun is getting it wrong. Accidentally making Earth the same size as the Sun and ping-ponging Mercury and Venus out past Uranus, Neptune and the Kuiper belt into the interstellar medium, for example. Or accidentally blowing up Jupiter and watching the debris form into a second asteroid belt.

The options you have for destruction are nearly as diverse as the options for construction. You can simply delete a planet, but it's far more fun to explode it into eight

chunks. Or 16. Or 237. Or, best of all, shred the planet and leave it as a dusty space cloud.

After loading up a model of our solar system, I methodically turned every single planet to dust, and sped up time so that each second in the real world was ten days in the simulation. Mercury was the first to smear out into a ring, followed by the remains of Venus, Earth and Mars. A few hundred years later, the solar system was little more than a series of concentric rings of dust. Which, if you think about it, is a bit bleak.

Main attraction

Universe Sandbox's most impressive achievement, however, lies in illustrating how the force of gravity affects every tiny little object in all of existence. One scenario has baseballs, dice, golfballs and footballs orbiting a 20cm-wide bowling ball. After a while, they clump together into little groups like baby planets.

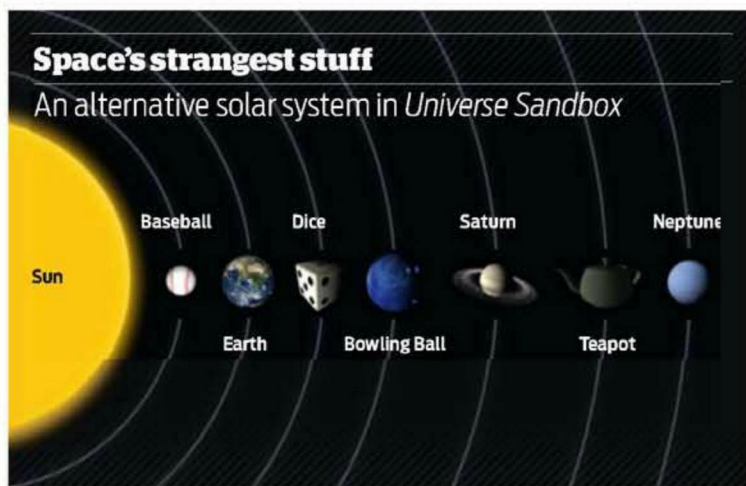
That's what elevates this above most other physics simulations: the balance maintained between ensuring that processes are

accurately represented and simultaneously ensuring that the sim is accessible enough to pick up and play with. Not every single physical process is perfectly modelled (partly because we don't yet perfectly understand every physical process), but it's accurate enough to answer important questions such as "what's the most efficient way to hurl the Earth into the sun?" The answer, if you were wondering, is to stop it dead in its orbit.

As with most games of this type, you have to be content to make your own fun. *Universe Sandbox* won't tell you a story, and it's not going to hold your hand beyond a brief tutorial that introduces the interface. After that, you're on your own in the cosmos, albeit with a stack of fan-submitted simulations to play around with. It's far more fun mucking about with those than creating your own universe from scratch.

The camera is a little fiddly at times, but my biggest complaint is that the simulator doesn't come with any sound or music. While I appreciate that's realistic, given the lack of orchestras in the vacuum of space, it would have been nice to have some ambient music quietly twinkling away in the background.

Universe Sandbox isn't going to change your life. It isn't going to make you cry, and it won't sit in the top of your most-played list in Steam for weeks. But if you like the idea of an interactive orrery that you can rip apart and put back together in whatever way you like, and you're happy to feed it with a bit of imagination, it's hard to find a better way to spend £6. ■



"Mercury was the first to smear into a ring of dust"

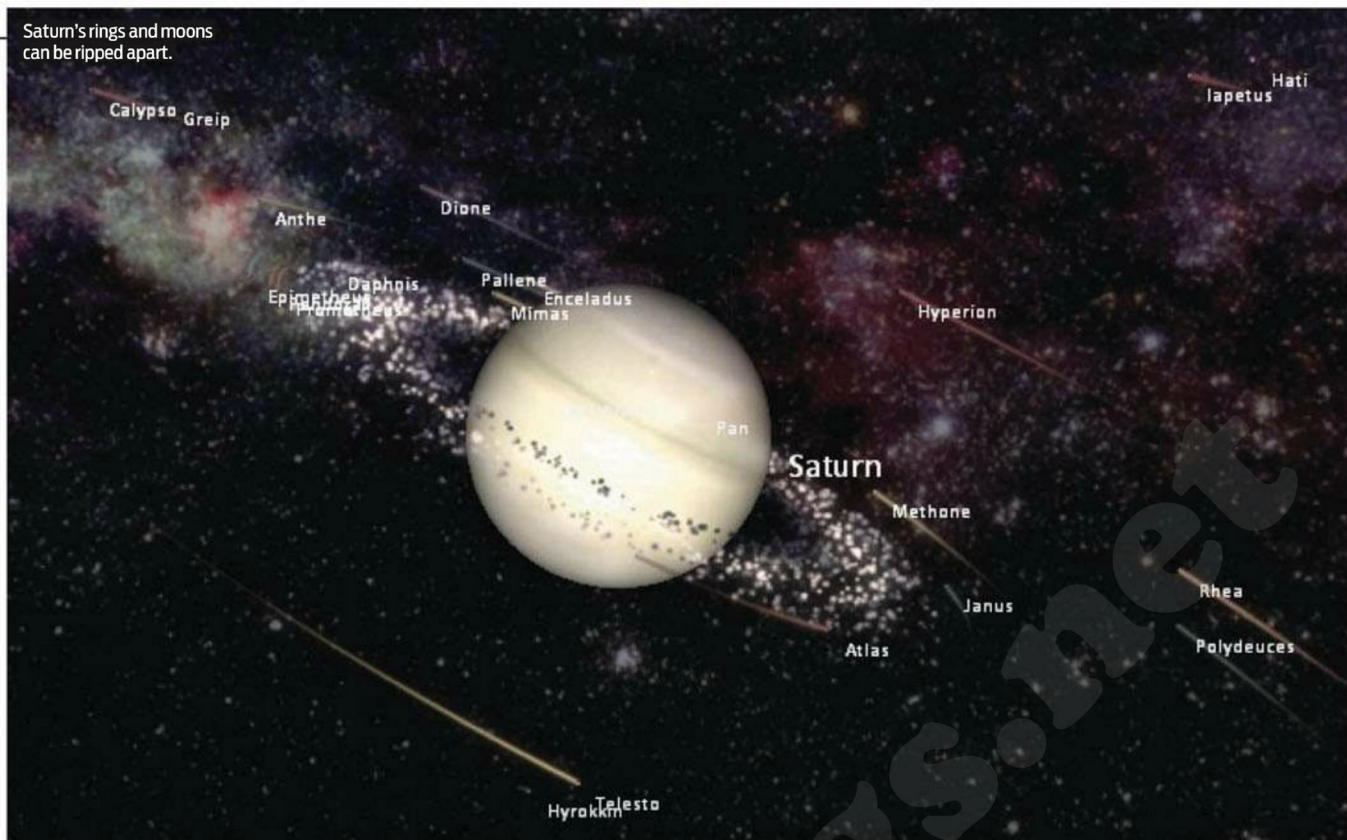
◆ Expect to pay £6.99 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Giant Army ◆ Developer In-house
◆ Multiplayer None ◆ Link universesandbox.com

VERDICT

Fun with physics. If you're happy to dig to find your treasures, *Universe Sandbox* has them in spades.

PC GAMER
84

Saturn's rings and moons can be ripped apart.



The sense of scale is phenomenal.



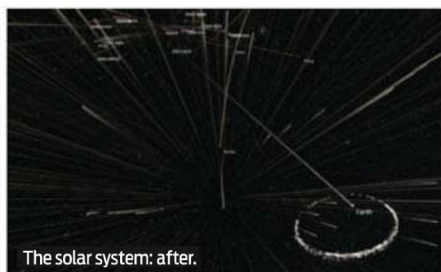
Some bad news for Bertrand Russell here.



Slamming moons together is tremendous fun.



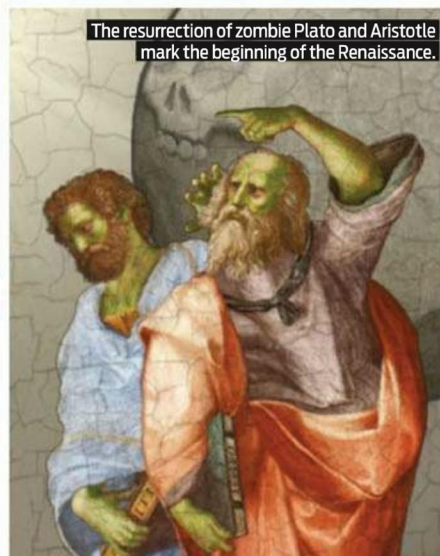
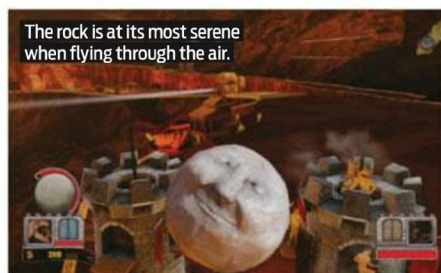
The solar system: before.



The solar system: after.



You can simulate past and future spacecraft missions.



BOULDER DASH

Strategic bowler meets tower defence. Genre bending **ROCK OF AGES** gathers no moss. **By Tom Hatfield**

Need to know

What is it?

The world's first strategy bowling game

Influenced by

Art history, *Marble Madness*

Play it on

Dual-core CPU, 1.5GB RAM, GeForce 7/Radeon HD 3000

Alternatively

Zeno Clash, 82%

Copy protection

Steam

Nothing is sacred to *Rock of Ages*. Priceless Greek urn? Smash it. Beloved historical figure? Squish them. Tragic Greek myth? Illustrate it by having tiny demons poke a man in the bottom. Anything that stops you from rolling your rock to the end of the course is there to be flattened.

Sessions of *Rock of Ages* have two phases. In the first you construct towers and catapults on your track to keep the enemy's rock away from the gate protecting your squishy leader character. In the second you roll your boulder along the enemy's heavily defended course and batter down the door to the opposing general. You use your defences to try to destroy or slow the enemy rock while taking the shortest possible path to your own target.

The rolling is the most fun by far. You're in direct control of the rock, which feels incredibly weighty and

substantial as it skips, jumps and crashes through obstacles. Carefully guiding the boulder around, over or through defences, is where the real challenge lies – and crushing catapults, cows and elephants beneath your mighty boulder is just smashing. Occasionally you're interrupted by a pointless boss fight, which is nowhere near as much fun as the rest of the game. Still, it's hard to complain when you're defeating an animated version of Michelangelo's David by repeatedly hitting him in the stones.

Where the artistry of *Rock of Ages* crumbles is in that first, strategic-defence building phase. In theory it's the more thoughtful, tactical side of the game, with a whole variety of towers, animals and siege weaponry for you to deploy. The problem is that there's a very narrow window of opportunity in which to place your defences before your boulder is

unleashed, so there isn't time to do much but scatter these things at a few key chokepoints. Multiplayer opponents are smarter and require more thought, but more often than not games end in a straight race between two rolling stones.

What keeps you coming back is the brilliant silliness of it all. *Rock of Ages* takes you on a tour through art history, having boulder-based battles with a variety of historical figures, from King Leonidas to Leonardo da Vinci. Each is represented by a cutout model based on famous paintings, dancing around and gibbering unintelligibly. The mix of highbrow art and lowbrow humour is clearly inspired by Terry Gilliam's classic Monty Python animations, and even if you know nothing about art it's hilarious to see that one picture of Vlad the Impaler that everyone uses starring in an impromptu *Castlevania* skit.

Rock of Ages provides a few hours of great fun, and the unique flavour and hilarious cutscenes are worth the budget pricetag. Don't expect it to hold up to repeated playthroughs, but this is a game about smashing up artwork with a big rock, and there's nothing wrong with that. ■

VERDICT

Knockabout in every sense, *Rock of Ages* is quirky, fun and characterful. Just don't expect longevity or depth.

PC GAMER
75

◆ Expect to pay £7 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Atlus ◆ Developer ACE team
◆ Multiplayer 2-player, online or split screen versus ◆ Link www.atlus.com/rockofages

FARE

All aboard the surprisingly good **BUS & CABLE CAR SIMULATOR**. *By Steve Hogarty*

It is only in the absence of light that we may appreciate the dawn, and it is only through *not* being a bus and cable car driver that one can truly appreciate what it means to be a bus and cable car driver.

Bus & Cable Car Simulator starts off not in a bus or a cable car, but on foot in your rundown San Francisco flat. Unlike so many of these simulators, you're not permanently wedged into a cockpit. Instead, you're a real human in a functional facsimile of the city, tasked with driving to and from the depot, sleeping, obeying traffic laws and improving your social standing by purchasing sunglasses. Swaddling this bus simulation in such a rich personal context elevates *Bus & Cable Car Simulator* above the quagmire of rough-edged, shoestring autism in which the genre is drowning. It also makes it remarkably fun.

It's detailed too: set the route and destination on your onboard computer, make your stops to schedule, take fares from customers (manually keying-in the correct charge), greet commuters (in either happy, unhappy or a neutral tone), open and close doors, play with the windscreen wipers.

In rainy weather the windows will steam up if you don't turn on the ventilation. And as you drive and earn a wage through a series of missions, you'll unlock better buses, vintage cable cars, a nicer apartment and a faster car.

B&CCS still feels like a budget sim title, with nonsense physics, awkward menus and distracting glitches, but a wealth of ambition and character transforms it from a blank-faced sim into a genuinely enjoyable curiosity. ■

PC GAMER
60



◆ Expect to pay £24.99 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Excalibur
◆ Developer Astragon/TML Studios ◆ Multiplayer No ◆ Link bit.ly/p9CGJu

POORT

Contain yourself. **PORTS: PRESSURE AT THE PORT** isn't that exciting. *By Steve Hogarty*

Those ports. Those crazy, panicked ports. Don't let the gentle lapping of the salty brine fool you: ports are a veritable hotbed of frenzied activity.

Cranes must be operated, containers must be lifted – very, very slowly, and driven to other bits of the port, then slowly, carefully placed on the ground again. Differently sized cranes must then be driven in such a way that they may lower their grabbing arms, resting comfortably atop the – oh, hold on, this container isn't correctly aligned. It's a full four degrees out of place.

Out, get out of the big crane. The big crane is useless now isn't it, you massive arse. Run back to the forklift and drive to the wayward, radical container. Slowly pick it up, reverse a bit, turn slightly, forwards again, lower, lower, drop, reverse, get out, big crane, try again. Manoeuvre the

arm with all the manoeuvrability of continental drift and there: that's one container properly loaded. And, disgracefully, not once was there the slightest impression of the actual work that takes place at the ports.

As anybody who's spent some time down the docks will know, crane operation is more complex than *Ports'* drastically simplified control scheme suggests. No control panels here, no gauges, no weight calibrations to make. Rather, this is an elaborate, unchallenging and horrendously animated block moving puzzle, which will frustrate through a mixture of tediously fail-proof mechanics and cantankerous container detection. The stock photography of shipping containers is nice, but otherwise this is an affront to the proud and hardworking people of the ports. ■

PC GAMER
22



◆ Expect to pay £29.99 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Excalibur
◆ Developer Astragon/Contendo Media ◆ Multiplayer No ◆ Link bit.ly/p9CGJu

DREAM CAR

Reality ends up twistier than Lombard Street in
DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO By Richard Cobbett

Need to know

What is it?

Driving meets out-of-body weirdness in the shadow of *GTA*.

Influenced by

Life on Mars

Play it on

Dual Core 2.4GHz, 2GB RAM, 512MB 3D card

Alternatively

Test Drive Unlimited 2, 67%

Copy protection

Online check on load

Deep in a coma dream, Tanner floors his imaginary gas pedal and begins the chase. The suspect in the red SUV desperately weaves in and out of traffic, but if he's hoping the risk of civilian casualties will keep him safe, he's in the wrong car chase.

Tanner may not yet realise he's lying in a hospital bed, but that doesn't stop reality being his subconscious's bitch. As the suspect hits the freeway, Tanner becomes a floating, ethereal spirit, possesses a truck driver coming the other way, and turns his truck into a high-speed battering ram.

And later, things get a bit odd.

Driver: San Francisco is one of the weirdest driving games ever, in the best possible way. It's Life on Mars turned into a wheelman's wet dream. Tanner's ability to shift between cars at will takes what was previously a

straightlaced series and makes it constantly fun, funny and chaotic. In the main story missions, it's treated as a superpower that only Tanner and his partner are initially aware of. In side-missions, it's cheerfully abused to hand out such objectives as coming first and second in the same race, helping a femme-fatale evade the cops and turning dangerous driving into a televised artform.

In your dreams

Tanner's enthusiasm for all of these is infectious, and the fact that he's temporarily possessing drivers instead of simply their cars makes for great in-game chatter from other terrified passengers. For instance, to convince his partner, Tanner torments a boy-racer by leaping into him and forcing him to smash into cops and leap off moving car transporters. Another couple of missions are about scaring people to

the point of heart-attack through high-speed insanity. If all this wasn't openly presented as a dream, Tanner would be the biggest dick this side of *Saints Row 2*. Instead, you can enjoy the ride, guilt-free.

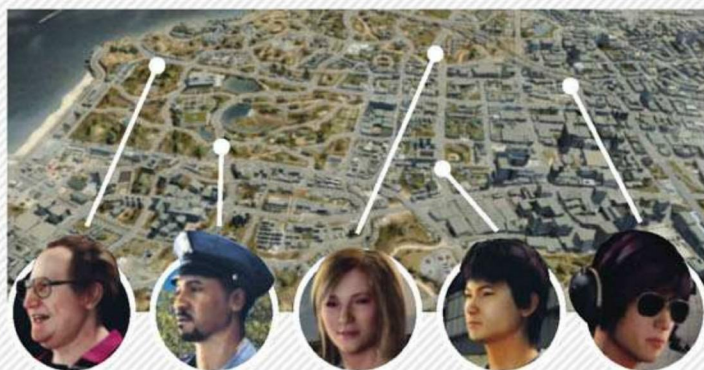
It can be a bumpy one though, especially on PC. This isn't a great port, starting with the fact that it quite obviously is one. Graphically, it's unimpressive, and with no real options beyond switching anti-aliasing on or off. The biggest annoyance, however, is that the controls are designed for a controller with analogue sticks, and trying to play with keyboard and mouse is a recipe for insanity. You're also stuck with Ubisoft's DRM, which demands an online check when you fire the game up, though at least it lets you play offline after that.

Even with a controller, the actual driving is usually mediocre, with poor handling in most vehicles, and very rubber-banded races. Rarely do you come across a particularly difficult mission. This keeps the story humming along, but makes the occasional spikes all the more noticeable when they do show up.

Without its shifting element, *Driver: San Francisco* would be enjoyable enough mediocrity, but nothing special next to other driving games. With shifting, it's one of the most enjoyable racing games in a very long time. Gimmicky or not, there's a gleeful purity to *Driver's* action, from its lack of gun battles and on-foot action, to the way it soon convinces you that magically weaponising oncoming traffic can be as natural as a handbrake turn. That especially is a hell of a trick. ■

Pinch my ride

Body surfing to unlock side-missions



Driving instructor

Shockingly, he's a jerk. Teach him a lesson by driving so recklessly he has a coronary.

Cops

There's a bomb in the city. Get there in time for the boys in blue to save the day.

Duke and Jules

First place isn't enough for this racing duo. Swap between them to second, as well.

Jun

He and his friend keep betting their lives on races. Get in his head and save his life.

Helicopter pilot

You don't get to fly, but you can ride shotgun and track down a lead on a terrorist.

"Gimmicky or not, there's a gleeful purity to the action"

◆ Expect to pay £40 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Ubisoft ◆ Developer Reflections Interactive
 ◆ Multiplayer None ◆ Link www.driver-thegame.com

VERDICT

Hardly the drive of your life, but easily one of the most memorable – and a great one-time gimmick done well.

PC GAMER
80





Stop! My 100 points in Speech compels thee!



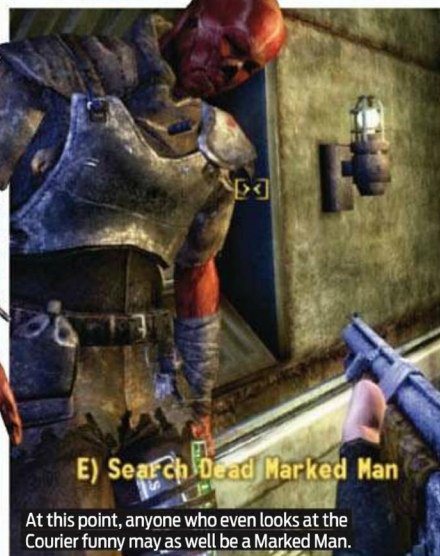
Even by *Fallout* standards, The Divide is a seriously rundown place to live.



Ever get the feeling that someone's watching you?



Drat. I can never find the barcode on these explosions.



E) Search Dead Marked Man

At this point, anyone who even looks at the Courier funny may as well be a Marked Man.

ROAD TO RUIN

The Courier's final delivery is to **FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS - LONESOME ROAD**. By Richard Cobbett

Need to know

What is it?

The final DLC for the post-apocalyptic *Fallout: New Vegas*, sending the Courier into the shadow of America's nuclear past.

Influenced by

Wasteland

Play it on

Dual Core, 4GB RAM, 512MB 3D card

Alternatively

Old World Blues, 83%

Copy protection

Steamworks

There are three problems with this, the last story-based *New Vegas* DLC pack, and two of them are in the title. It's an almost relentlessly linear trudge from one side of a rubble-strewn canyon to the other, with only an endearingly bleepy new ED-E eyebot for company. There are few sidequests along the way, and very few secrets for you to discover.

There's also little to distract you from the constant attacks by mutants and monsters at every step, and that's the third problem. Instead of going out on a big, adventurous high, *Lonesome Road* is practically a *Fallout* FPS, complete with named minibosses, Deathclaws and the new Tunneler enemies liberally scattered around. There's even one of those sequences where you have to stay alive on a slowly descending lift.

There's no doubt they fit the setting, but not the role-playing

action that *New Vegas* does best.

It's like *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* spawning a whole expansion based on nothing but bosses.

Your reasons for this suicidal insanity are oddly underwhelming, given the build-up to them in the original game and last three DLC packs. During the main *New Vegas* storyline, you discovered that your unlucky courier wasn't the one meant to deliver Mr House's Platinum Chip. The man who was, an infamous figure called Ulysses, passed on the job so that you'd get the assignment instead – and not to do you a favour.

Lonesome Road is the story of why he set you on the path to being shot in the head and left for dead, and why he's still nursing a grudge – even if the best in-game reason he has for you actually running his gauntlet may as well be, "Because otherwise you just wasted £7.49, idiot."

As a character, he's shown up in name and action throughout the DLC packs, but this is the first time you get to meet him face-to-face... and he's not worth the wait. His motivations are reasonable, but while he thinks he's an erudite philosopher, he comes across as a pretentious, jabbering bore, obsessed with something that you as the player never actually did, trying to lay down a guilt trip that just feels hollow.

Ulysses does at least vary his spiel based on the faction you support, and has a very good chance of kicking your arse if you don't have the necessary skills to talk him out of his grand plan at the end.

And that's about all you get, ignoring a few new toys such as a cool rocket launcher, some forgettable items and Perks, and another unnecessary boost to the level cap. None are particularly vital though, nor justify the expense if you haven't already rushed to buy this.

If you simply feel nostalgic for the Mojave and want to go back, get the *Old World Blues* DLC. After conquering that, walking the *Lonesome Road* isn't the only thing that makes this last DLC a pedestrian affair. ■

VERDICT

A disappointing end to the Courier's travels, somehow going out with a nuclear explosion and a whimper at the exact same time.

PC GAMER
53

◆ Expect to pay £7.49 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Bethesda ◆ Developer Obsidian
◆ Multiplayer None ◆ Link fallout.bethsoft.com

CITY SLICKER

DEMOLITION INC razes cities and raises spirits. *By Tim Stone*

A speeding sedan hits a puddle of green goop, careers off the road, and ploughs through the wall of an apartment block. The gouged block teeters then topples. Rubble slumps into the street below, crushing passing vehicles. One particularly energetic chunk bounces across six lanes of black-top and strikes a carefully placed cow. The cow explodes, detonating a fuel tanker. Caught in the blast, three more apartment blocks lose interest in verticality. *Mission Completed.*

To actively dislike this surprisingly cerebral puzzle game, you'd need to actively dislike watching cars skid, buildings collapse, and cows explode. To put it another way: the only people that won't enjoy *Demolition Inc* are elderly nuns, earthquake survivors, and humourless Hindus.

Conquering the 16 levels requires thoughtful placement of car-

diverting oil slicks, wheel glue puddles, jump pads and explodo-cows. You'll also need a dash of arcade skill. In your flying saucer's armoury (you're an extra-terrestrial Fred Dibnah) there are usually a few steering wheels. Activate one of these and a hapless automobile of your choosing can be guided onto a ramp or into a volatile barrel/bovine.

Direct destruction also comes courtesy of such spectacular unlockable super-weapons as giant steerable wrecking balls and hand-placed earthquake bombs.

A challenge mode extends the shelf-life of this cheap strategy snack, but even so its appeal will start wearing thin after a few days of happy hooliganism. For longevity and an 80%+ score, the game needs a random level generator and maybe a multiplayer mode. ■

PC GAMER
74



◆ Expect to pay £8 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Steam
◆ Developer Zeroscale ◆ Multiplayer none ◆ Link bit.ly/n8uU7

UNFAIR COP

Prepare to pig out in **HECTOR: BADGE OF CARNAGE**. *By Richard Cobbett*

In Hector's first adventure, you passed off a heroin addict as a sex doll as part of a puzzle to blow up a shop. That was Episode 1. In comparison to some of the stuff you get up to later in the trilogy, that is nothing. Nada. Zip. Zero. Zilch.

Experienced together in demonic union, these three point-and-click adventures make up one of the meanest, most sadistic descents into depravity this side of *Team Fortress 2* erotic fan-fiction.

But also one of the funniest. In fact, the most surprising thing is just how non-offensive Hector's adventures are. They clearly should be, with puzzles ranging from drugging a date with roofies (if only to shut her up), to breaking a hobo's new-found sobriety, torturing suspects, lying, cheating and flashing Hector's hideous arse around town. Somehow though, it's

all so over the top, so tongue in cheek, it never stops being funny. You're the worst cop in the worst town in Britain, fighting a terrorist who wants to make it a better place. If that doesn't say it all, it's only because nobody's called you a pus-filled testicle sack yet. You pus-filled testicle sack, you.

As adventures, the games are OK without being great – traditional in design, with a few padding issues made up for by instant (and insulting) hints if you get stuck. As comedies, they're superb, with the poo jokes and naughty words backed up by no small amount of actual wit. If you don't think it's a kind of humour you'll be able to enjoy, then no, you almost certainly won't. If you're not a great screaming wuss, it's an episodic series well worth giving a shot. ■

PC GAMER
83



◆ Expect to pay £17.50 ◆ Release Out now ◆ Publisher Telltale Games
◆ Developer Straandlooper ◆ Multiplayer None ◆ Link www.telltalegames.com



FLATLAND

POPULOUS: the steamrolling simulator for megalomaniacs everywhere.

Need to know

What is it?

The original god game from when gods were rude.

Influenced by

The Bible, probably

Play it on

Trust me, your PC can run this

Alternatively

From Dust, 73%

I've heard people say that the recent artsy god-botherer *From Dust* is a *Populous* rip-off. It's a comment that makes me want to winch my mouth open a full nine inches and bark a derisive honk into whatever face said it. The only similarity between *From Dust* and this – the dusty, distant genesis of god games – is that you can make land go up and down.

The (highly imperfect) *From Dust* has you sculpting the land in clever, manipulative ways. In *Populous*, it's your job to steamroll an already sculpted world into featureless plains. You're an invisible gardener, clearing space so that your people can build rows and rows of castles. Because people who live in castles are better at praying, and getting prayers makes gods strong enough to inflict suffering and extinction on other-coloured civilisations.

So: build a hill-free community of

castle-owning devouts, and the prayers of your people will build your mana, allowing you to inflict swamps, floods and volcanos on your foe – who's doing the same to you.

Earthquakes aren't much bother. Just raise the land back up, so you've got the flat land your people require. Swamps are an inconvenience, forcing you to raise the land and lower it again.

Levelling up

Volcanoes are a Van Damme uppercut to the nuts, adding rocks to the landscape. You have to lower it to sea level to get rid of them, then raise it again to build on. Inflicting floods is a great way to commit celestial suicide if your castles were all on the lowest level of land. This is all *Populous* is. A competitive flatness maintenance game where you find increasingly harsh ways to unflatten your enemy's land.

Of course, it's easy to sneer. It's easy and makes you feel big, that's why it's the go-to reaction for inadequate pricks like myself. But something conscientious inside me, something I thought long dead, decided to read strategy guides, to see if I was missing anything. Turns out I wasn't – people use the same cheap tricks I did. Drowning enemy knights and villagers as soon as they got close to my villages. Temporarily unflattening my land, causing castles to downgrade, and spit out a new settler. Cheap, valid tactics.

Populous may have created a genre, but its interest today is strictly as a relic. A relic from the times when prophets like Molyneux found their feet, and chip wizards like Hull-born Rob Hubbard probably didn't realise they'd be quietly worshipped 22 years later.

So, historians will enjoy fiddling around with *Populous*, and you might want to pay homage to the old gods yourself. There's enough to keep your brain swilling around in its think juices for an evening, even if you will spend half of it cursing our barbarian MS-DOS-wielding forebears for their tough-to-guess keyboard shortcuts. ■

VERDICT

Dull enough to make you wonder if you were somehow stupider when you liked it the first time around.

PC GAMER
68

◆ Expect to pay £4 ◆ Publisher EA ◆ Developer Bullfrog
◆ Multiplayer Yes ◆ Link gog.com ◆ First review PCG 13, 78% (re-issue)

PANTS ON FIRE

RUSE makes a mockery of military intelligence.

Ruse is an interesting strategy game. Zoom in, and you've got an RTS with a little too much distance between the units. Zoom out, and you see that its heart is more in the world of boardgames and tabletop warfare. Units transform into counters. Fact-furring deceptions can be smacked down like playing cards. And the biggest visual clue: fully zoomed out, the world transforms into a tabletop boardgame war.

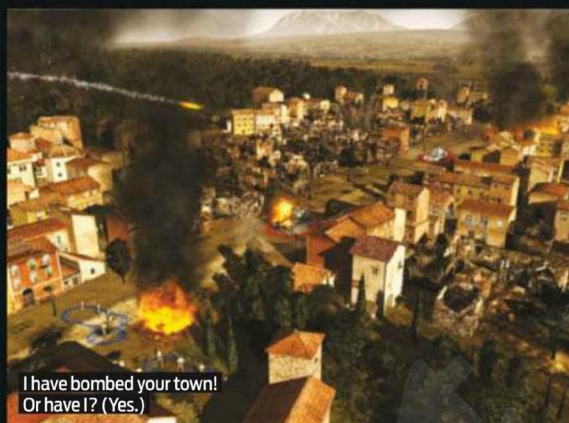
When I first played *Ruse*, my reaction was frosty. But I'm frequently wrong. I was wrong when I thought that gyrating your hips in a fashion that caused your penis to collide with your belly was how you had sex.

I was wrong when I went to see a band at Staines town hall, climbed onto the roof and tried to convince

passers-by that the mayor had kidnapped me. I was wrong when I thought that knowing the reason for being dumped would make it easier to accept it. I was particularly wrong when I thought that listing things I've been wrong about would be a good way to pad out a review. I can undo none of these things.

But one wrong I can attempt to right – I was wrong when I scored *Ruse* on the Xbox 360 a paltry six out of ten. Perhaps I was focusing on the embarrassing jokes, and the skin-crawlingly naff cutscenes. Perhaps it just didn't work as well on the 360. Because the game, the thing I was supposed to be scoring, is a charming back-and-forth of duplicity and dirty tricks. Give it a go. It doesn't use Ubisoft's DRM either, so there's a thing. ■

PC GAMER
82



I have bombed your town!
Or have I? (Yes.)



Heavy artillery, deploy
the party ribbons.

◆ Expect to pay £10 ◆ Publisher Ubisoft ◆ Developer Eugen Systems
◆ Multiplayer Yes ◆ Link ruse.uk.ubi.com ◆ First review 84%



Diana Ross is the
secret super unit.

SUPREME COMMANDER 2

Hello, I am a massive robot. People said I dumbed down for this sequel, but I have added the words 'dumbed-down' to my spam filter and now I cannot hear them. People say I am the bastard-born child of *SupCom* and *Total Annihilation*, but I say those people have been reading *A Game of Thrones* and just want an excuse to swear.

People say that my newer, less involved approach was a compromise. To this, I reply, I am a robot. You cannot hurt my feelings. I am still a magnificent spectacle. My tech-trees may have been pruned, but they bear succulent, nuclear fruit.

Now, leave me. I need to run a series of internal diagnostics to identify the cause of this unaccustomed ocular leakage. ■

PC GAMER
74

◆ Expect to pay £10 ◆ Publisher Mastertronic ◆ Developer Gas Powered Games ◆ First review PCG 212, 85%



"I want that one."

KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS

Dog Days is the first shooter that tries to satirise the generation of teenagers who'll film women dying from anaphylactic shock because going over to help wouldn't look as good on YouTube. The script might be mostly charmless and the characters unsympathetic, but the visual style and the mockumentary setup will actually ferry you from the start of the game to the end, without becoming too misanthropic.

It gives us a new litmus test for gender equality, too. When we get a game starring two haggard, foul-mouthed and overweight female leads, and that game sells only slightly disappointingly, then we'll have equality. Come on, Square Enix. Get Judi Dench and Helen Mirren on board. ■

PC GAMER
68

◆ Expect to pay £10 ◆ Publisher Sold Out ◆ Developer IO Interactive ◆ First review PCG 218, 70%



Warning: this sexiness
isn't in-engine.

DUNGEON KEEPER 2

This is one of the rare games from superyesteryear that maintains its allure. Playing the evil keeper, building a dungeon, taking down heroes... brilliant.

The pacing of the singleplayer levels bears cheerful repetition, and the introduction of new rooms, monsters, enemies, spells and structures is ratcheted brilliantly. And the best thing: after playing the first *Dungeon Keeper* you can relive the long-dead excitement of graphics getting better. Remember that? The panicked excitement of the future, when you stumbled across video content on your Encarta CD-ROM? Do you remember, erm, Suede? Power to Good Old Games, too – they appear to have cleared up a problem with Windows 7. ■

PC GAMER
93

◆ Expect to pay £4 ◆ Publisher EA ◆ Developer Bullfrog ◆ First review PCG 73, 90%



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Razer's sharp new gaming laptop

THE BIG STORY It's a sleek, stylish and innovative gaming machine from the people who already make half of your other peripherals

Peripherals manufacturers Razer have unveiled what they call the 'world's first true gaming notebook'.

While Alienware's lawyers reach for their pens, it's at least true that the Blade is elegant for a gaming laptop. It's just 2.24cm tall, has a MacBook-like minimalist design, and yet is tricked out with a Core i7 and 8GB RAM.

The main novelty is an LCD multitouch screen and ten 'dynamic adaptive' macro keys. The full-colour key logos change to in-game action icons, while the touchpad can also show off

contextual information. It's potentially brilliant, if enough games support its use.

Despite costing almost \$3,000 in the US, however, the Blade comes with a very average GeForce GT 555M graphics processor. It's not Alienware that Razer has to worry about, though – it's alienation. The launch of the Blade was preceded by a marketing campaign that suggested the Blade would be the saviour of PC gaming, and that could annoy many potential fans.

From a business point of view, the timing of the Blade's release is ballsy. HP, the world's largest PC manufacturer,

failed to do much with custom gaming rig outfit VoodooPC after they bought them, and are now having second thoughts about staying in the business at all.

If nothing else, the Blade has at least got people talking. Some, like Joel Johnson at Kotaku, argue that Razer has created an entirely new platform with the Blade. But the truth is that the Blade won't save PC gaming, because PC gaming doesn't need to be saved. This is simply an interesting laptop with some innovative touches, and hopefully construction of that built-in tablet screen will fall in price. ■

Adam Oxford



The innovative tablet screen is a great idea.

HP'S NEW GAMES MACHINE

GAMES PC ECONOMIC PHOENIX RISES FROM THE ASHES

» Hello irony. This is HP calling. Not three weeks after telling the world they were thinking of selling off or spinning off their PC business and focusing on cloud software and stuff, HP have announced a brand new and reasonably priced gaming rig called – get this – 'Phoenix'. Was this deliberate? Unlikely, as they'd have had to change the original name and packaging at short notice, but who knows? The important thing is that it'll cost under £950 and looks like it'll have a very capable technical spec. **AO**



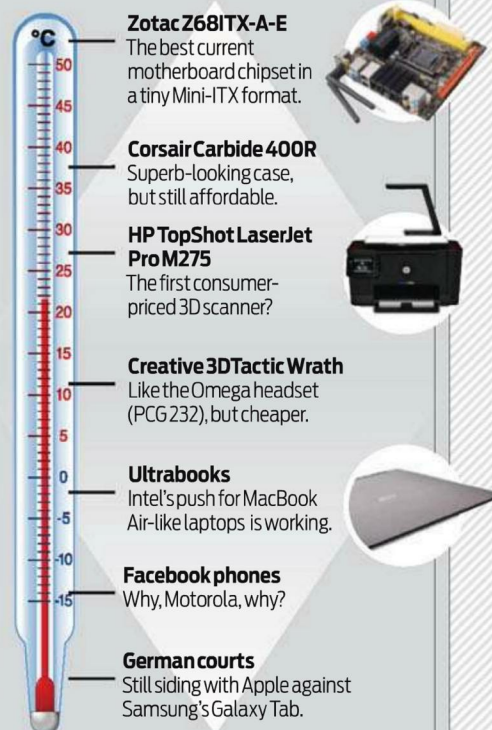
HYBRID HARD DRIVE

STORAGE SSD MEETS TRADITIONAL TECH AT ALMOST 1GBPS

» Hard drive manufacturers OCZ are launching a new type of hybrid hard drive that combines a 100GB SSD with 1TB of traditional storage. Like Intel's RST technology on Z68 motherboards, background software shifts regularly used files to the fast SSD area of the drive, using the HDD for bulk storage. OCZ claim almost 1GBps data transfer rates, which means the drive requires the extra bandwidth of a PCI-E slot to reach its top speeds. **AO**

HOT PRODUCTS

MEASURING HARDWARE FEVER



The quest for superfast start-up

Can Windows 8 really deliver the holy grail of almost instantaneous boot up?

According to a recent blog entry by Microsoft, one of the big goals for Windows 8 will be a huge reduction in boot times, making it quicker and easier for us to get to our games. In the latest post about the operating system, believed to be due for release next year, Gabe Aul says that Windows 8 will be able to start from cold to a usable desktop screen in less than eight seconds. See more at bit.ly/windows8boot.

Boot times are important. I spent months trying to get the clunky Vista to boot smoothly before giving up and ditching it in favour of Ubuntu. One of the reasons that tablets like the iPad have proved so popular over the last couple of years is the fact that they are, like a phone, 'always on'. Want to check your mail? Just tap the screen. Can't remember the name of the actor in the film you're watching? Same thing.

To be fair, Windows 7 is much, much quicker at recovering from standby or hibernate than any of its predecessors, but even so, it feels like you're turning a crank handle to get it started compared with an Android tablet or iPad. Cold booting is a hassle, but while Microsoft have historically

"One of the reasons that tablets like the iPad have proved so popular is that they are 'always on'"

tried to encourage the use of standby and hibernate, they're finally acknowledging that people still prefer to shut a PC off entirely. According to their research, over 50% of power transitions on desktop PCs are shutdown rather than sleep modes, and even on laptops that number stays resiliently high at 45%.

And that's as it should be. The power drain of standby mode is still quite high, and restoring from hibernate – which involves loading a multi-gigabyte memory image back off the hard drive – isn't much quicker than loading a nice, fresh desktop anyway.

The fast booting speed of Windows 8 will still be optional, as it's a separate mode from a completely cold boot. When shutting

down for a fast boot, programs are shut down, but the small kernel is held in hibernation as before. It looks and feels like a full system reset, but actually the kernel state isn't refreshed.

Notebook manufacturers Acer, however, are already ahead of Microsoft. For their latest laptop, the thinner-than-a-MacBook-Air Aspire S3, the company have focused on getting start times down to tablet-like levels.

By including a fast SSD drive, some extra power regulation hardware and playing around with Windows' energy-saving stacks, they've pulled off something rather incredible: shut the lid, and the S3 goes into standby mode from which it will recover in less than a second. If it's left in standby for too long, it will go into 'deep sleep' – a kind of hibernate plus – which Acer say it can snap out of in six seconds.

I've played around with the S3, and in the tests I did it was much quicker than that, awakening from deep sleep in just two or three seconds.

The most important thing is that the deep sleep mode is exceptionally low power. Acer reckon that the battery will last for nearly two months in this mode before fully discharging, which is much better than any other Windows laptop I've tested. Usually,

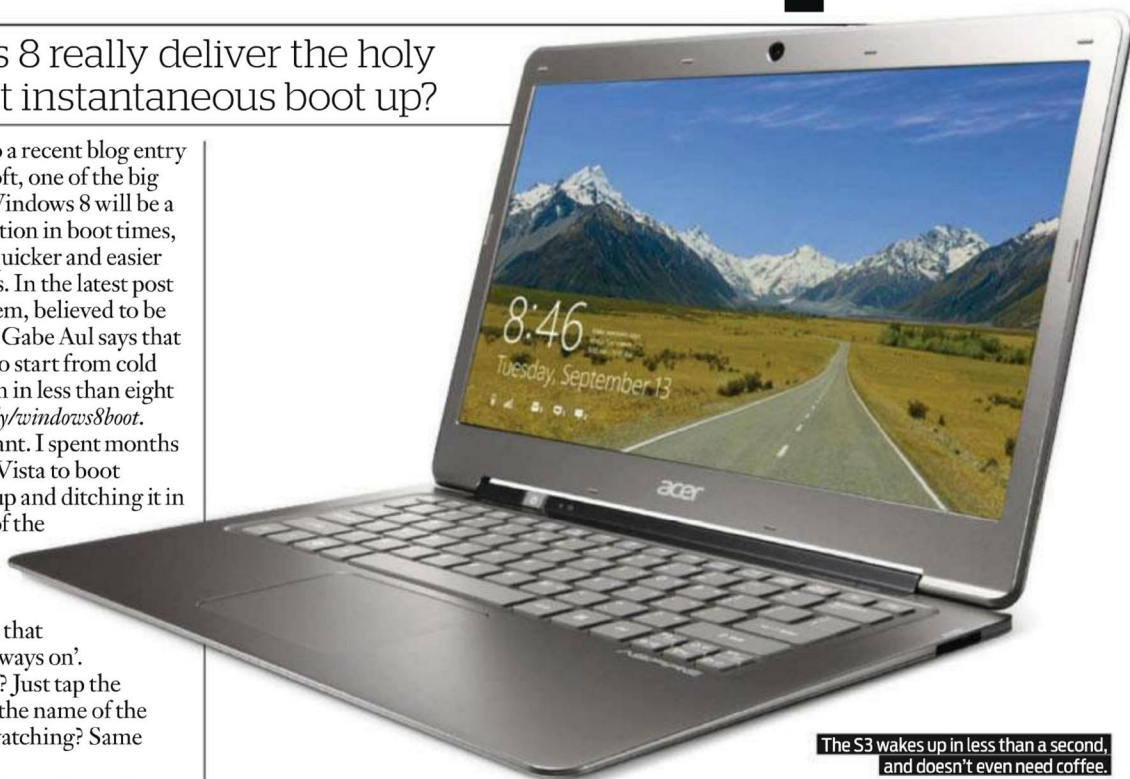
even in hibernate mode, a battery is fully depleted after three or four days, tops. Even MacBook users will be impressed with this feature of the S3, and OSX is a fairly snappy starter in its own right.

So there's no reason that Windows 8 shouldn't be able to get boot times down to those claimed, and if it does it'll make using a PC almost as convenient as a tablet, which will be a good thing. Here's hoping that a similar amount of effort will be spent reducing game loading times. ■

Adam Oxford

PLANS FOR INSTANT OFF?

While powering things up fast is important, EU legislators have met with PC manufacturers to discuss new rules for kit when it comes to turning itself off. Changes to the European Ecodesign Directive have been tabled that cover standby modes for networking kit. The plan is to force network adaptors in routers, PCs, phones and tablets to go into a sleep mode when not in use, and consume no more than 8W while in a state that can be restored to full power in less than a second. EU officials reckon that the amount of energy saved would be equivalent to the entire domestic consumption of Sweden.



The S3 wakes up in less than a second, and doesn't even need coffee.

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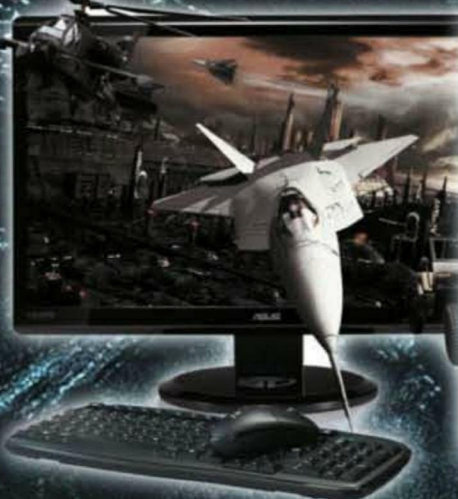


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Monitor shown for illustration purposes only



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BUYER'S ADVICE

CONTROLLERS

Whatever happened to serious sim sticks and shifts? **By Adam Oxford**

You'd be foolish to argue that PC gaming had a 'golden age', although some people try. Games are constantly evolving, along with the hardware. Some are good and some are bad, but over time, the ratio between the two remains fairly constant.

Peripherals, on the other hand...

Maybe I'm just getting old, but I do remember yesterday's sturdy and well-constructed controllers more fondly than the cheap plastic crap that dominates today. There was a time, in the late 90s/early 2000s, that PC peripherals were envied by console players for being of significantly higher quality, without costing significantly more. Force feedback meant real motors fighting your efforts to spin a wheel or move a stick with variable resistance. Steel reinforcements were common, as were high-quality clamps and vices.

Even the more bonkers ones out there (Microsoft's Strategic Commander?) had to be admired in their execution of a flawed vision.

Today, though...

So what's happened to all the really good peripherals?

There were lots of reasons why PC peripherals got bogged down in mediocrity. Chief culprits were cheap joypad designs that came over from the consoles, while at the same time, the popularity of the simulation game fell into decline. Post-PlayStation 2, manufacturers realised that most players would settle for faux feedback rumble, rather than the real thing.

What's the difference between rumble and force feedback?

Everything in the world. Most gamepads and sticks are kitted out with weighted motors that shake the controller to represent an explosion or wheel skid. Force feedback uses variable resistance to try to make the controller react as a real one would – so, for example, a good joystick will be almost impossible to move when the plane is in a crash dive.

Are all peripherals today rubbish?

Fortunately not. In fact, I've spent the month unearthing some of the finest hardware that PCs have ever seen. They're more expensive than they used to be, but they're the kind of real-world simulation tools that can turn a hobby into an obsession into a lifetime's worth of achievement. They're the best of the best.

Do people really buy them?

Oh yes. And there's no shame in having your own bucket racing

DICTIONARY

Wireless > There are lots of ways to do wireless. Bluetooth is best but expensive, so many gamepads use a proprietary connection in the 2.4GHz frequency instead.

These should be lag-free, but that wavelength is crowded and susceptible to interference.

Microswitch > A real, physical switch under a button, rather than just a rubber dome. Louder, harder-wearing and more pleasing to push, but also more expensive to manufacture and so fairly rare.

Analogue control > For analogue, you could also read 'pressure sensitive'. Essentially, if you've only got the acceleration button pushed a third of the way down, it will only apply a third of the power.

Trim wheel > Extra rudder controls to apply a small, fixed correction to an aircraft's direction of travel. If you have to ask what stuff like this is, though, you're probably not quite ready for a joystick set-up that has it as an extra.



Visit www.techradar.co.uk/reviews to find the latest, best prices.

seat with realistic pedals and tiptronic shifts if you love racing games, for example. Where you'll put it when you're not using it, on the other hand...

So what's the best joystick ever invented?

I'm glad you asked. It was almost certainly the Microsoft Force Feedback SideWinder 2. Reasonably priced and virtually indestructible, it boasted excellent feedback and a funky little throttle lever.

Is it bad for a controller to be PS3 compatible?

Since the PS3 uses standard USB ports for cabled controllers, most PC peripherals now work on either machine. That has helped cheap and nasty pads oust the better-built ones out of the market. However, since the PS3 also supports real force feedback, it doesn't affect the performance of higher-end ones. ■

ON TEST

CONTROLLERS

The peripherals that take games seriously. **By Adam Oxford**

TESTING CRITERIA

Build quality > The question of whether or not a games controller is the 'real thing', ie, that it's accurately modelled on a car or aircraft from the outside world, isn't as important as whether or not it's well built. These are premium grade components, so they really need to be up to the job.

Drivers > Preferably none, but if they are needed they'd better be easy to install and upgrade, and non-intrusive.

Force feedback > Does it feel authentic, or can your fingers tell that it's just a couple of pulleys and a solenoid at work?

Value for money > This is a surprisingly tricky one to call. Some of the peripherals on test here look, feel and work spectacularly, but they're way beyond the wallet of mere mortals – yet the price can be justified if the product is so incredibly niche that you just couldn't manufacture it for less.

T500 TS

£350 Thrustmaster

Of all the bits of kit on test this month, the Thrustmaster T500 TS is the one that makes me wish I was a lot more committed to simulation gaming than I really am.

If I had the passion for motor racing and the time to develop a real skill at driving games, climbing behind this wheel at the end of a long day would offer the kind of catharsis that other people get from cooking, collecting things or playing with trainsets. I know this because I've met people

"This made me wish I was more committed to simulation gaming than I really am"

who own the T500 TS, and that's exactly what I see them doing.

So what are the criteria that make a peripheral worth the kind of money that baffles most of us? 'Solidly built' doesn't even begin to describe it: the metal foot cage with pedals alone almost killed the courier who hauled the box upstairs to my office.

Then there's the attention to detail: the pedals themselves can be taken off and hung upside-down in the style of an F1 racing cockpit, and each lever and footrest has an improbably large number of ways that it can be adjusted for maximum comfort. The wheel itself, on the other hand, is



surprisingly plastic – apart from the large gear paddles, that is. But don't for a minute think that makes it inferior to those that more studiously ape their real-life racing counterparts. Not only is it solid, it's also really noisy; the 150N/mm² torque motor inside is so powerful that it requires its own cooling.

Which also means that as far as force feedback goes, this is the only peripheral I've tested that feels 'real'. It can tear the wheel out of your hands, and no amount of he-man twisting is going to pull you out of a skid.

It's not, of course, perfect – despite the gushing review so far. The gear paddles are enormous, but because they're fixed to the steering column rather than the wheel, they can still be hard to reach while cornering.

The large-diameter wheel is convincing, but it does make hitting some of the central controls tough while you're fighting with the motor.

This isn't a wheel that's especially fun to use, then – but in a good way. It's as near a true simulation as you'll get without visiting the McLaren plant in Chertsey, and yet it's also surprisingly simple to set up.

A few hours of playing with it convinced me that the price, for the right sort of enthusiast, is fine. The only real question it raises is why, with its manumatic gear shifts, is there a clutch pedal? ■



VERDICT

The T500 TS seems expensive, but it's worth every penny if you're after a proper driving simulator-like sensation.

PC GAMER
90

SPEC ♦ Wheel diameter 30cm ♦ Motor power 65W ♦ Force feedback Yes ♦ Connection USB
♦ Buttons 12 + D-pad ♦ Link www.thrustmaster.com

X-65F Pro Flight Combat System

£270 Saitek

You or I might think that the idea of a joystick that doesn't actually move is a bit odd, but apparently this is the way real pilots fly their planes these days. The joystick part of the all-metal Saitek X-65F system is absolutely rigid. Rather than moving around on a ball access, it reacts to pressure from all directions giving you up, down, left, right and a twisting axis for trim.

As realistic as this is, however, it's not something I could quite get used to: banking hard physically hurts the wrist when the thing you're pushing against doesn't give way. You also need to mount it to something really secure to stop yourself from pushing it right over.

If you can overcome your natural instinct to try to move the stick, though, the X-65F is the better of the two HOTAS (hand-on-throttle-and-stick) systems reviewed here this month. It may not look and feel as Vietnam-era authentic as the Thrustmaster Warthog, but it has a

similar number of controls broken up into a more flexible layout.

The breakout box houses joystick sensitivity controls and five extra keys for binding in four different profiles, which is especially useful. An extra two dials on the throttle for trim or rotor thrust make it almost as much fun for helicopter sims, as well.

For me, Saitek's rigid stick is just a little too much realism to cope with. I can't train my hands not to try to snap it off, and it feels like my tendons will go first. £270 is too much money to gamble: you definitely have to try the X-65F before you buy it, to work out if you'll ever get used to it.

If you can, and you're after a stick set-up that feels as convincingly at home in *Star Wars* (LucasArts has a



rumoured flight game coming up) as it does in *Secret Wars*, then it's an excellent system to own.

VERDICT

The fixed stick will take more getting used to than most will bear, but if it feels right, the rest of the kit is awesome.

PC GAMER
85

SPEC ♦ Construction All metal ♦ Buttons 72 + 2 x POV hats, 2 rotaries, scroll wheel ♦ Throttles Right & Left ♦ Total weight 4.2kg ♦ Link www.saitek.com

Ferrari F430 Force Feedback

£73 Thrustmaster

Despite the official licence – it's designed to look like the controls of the eponymous Ferrari F430 – Thrustmaster's wheel doesn't feel as authentic as its stablemate opposite. But then you wouldn't expect that from the price.

Instead what you get is a wheel that's much more affordable, but doesn't sacrifice an awful lot of quality to achieve the saving. The pedals may be plastic, but the base is weighty enough not to slip when you put your foot down, and the caps themselves are made of metal.

Likewise the wheel may not be as convincingly huge as the T500 TS, nor the force feedback quite as, well, forceful, but that does make it more enjoyable to use for most of us. Not only does it mean that all the buttons and shifts are always within a finger's reach, but also that you can Hoover up the XP points that a lot of racing games award for drifting your way

around corners: it's nigh-on impossible to force a skid with the weighty and earnestly realistic T500 TS, but lots of fun with this.

That's not to say that the F430 wheel is facile: it feels more than real enough for most of us and is a step up from, say, the Speedlink Carbon GT.

One slightly disappointing thing is the switch on the front of the wheel, modelled on Ferrari's Manettino control, which allows you to switch between settings for suspension, traction control and differential – unfortunately there aren't many games that support it, so its icons glow futilely most of the time.

You could map the switch to weapons systems in a game with driving/shooting elements, but there



aren't many of those around either. However, this doesn't detract from the F430's appeal. It's easily one of the best available for less than £100. ■

VERDICT

Not as true to life as the T500, but the F430 feels close enough to the real thing for the cost, and is lots of fun.

PC GAMER
86

SPEC ♦ Wheel diameter 28cm ♦ Force feedback Yes ♦ Connection USB ♦ Buttons 10 + D-pad ♦ Link www.thrustmaster.com

Black Widow

£20 Speedlink

The plan was to focus on high-end controllers, but Speedlink's Black Widow is almost irresistible at £20. Yes, it's plain black and plasticky, with a row of odd-looking buttons along the front, but it has a large throttle control for your left hand, which is unusual at this price, and it's very stable on the desk.

What's more, round the back of that throttle there's a trim switch rocker which makes up for the fact that the stick doesn't twist. Most importantly, neither part of the unit feels like it'll fall apart the first time you bank heavily to avoid enemy fire.

If you're not really a flight sim fan but want a stick that'll help you master aircraft combat in *Battlefield 3*, it's well worth checking out.

You don't get true force feedback with the Black Widow, but then again many expensive high-end joysticks, such as Thrustmaster's

HOTAS set-ups, don't feature this either. The rumble effects aren't bad, though, and are at least variable enough that you can differentiate between turbulence and explosions by touch alone.

The only thing that really gives away the price tag, in fact, is the quality of some of the fire buttons. There's no military grade microswitches here, just a slightly flimsy-feeling trigger that feels a little loose by comparison with more highly specced sticks.

I'd take a guess and say if you're dogfighting your way over wartorn Europe every night for hours on end, it's the big red button at the front that'll be first thing to wear out. ■



VERDICT

Won't take the heavy-duty pounding you'd give a high-end HOTAS, but good enough quality for occasional use.

PC GAMER

78

HOTAS Warthog

£280 Thrustmaster

If it's sim you want, then sim you'll get. Thrustmaster's HOTAS set-up is faithfully modelled on the controls of a USAF A-10C Thunderbolt, aka the Warthog. Or so I'm told: I've never sat in the cockpit of a tankbuster jet, but it does look uncannily like the layout featured in Eagle Dynamics' recent sim of the same name.

What there is no doubt about is that it's a remarkable piece of engineering. You could probably land a plane on top of the kit and not damage it, and even if you're sanguine about sims the toggle switches and fire buttons beg to be played with. Despite the price and the playful appearance, there's no force

feedback, though. This is an earnest controller for an earnest business.

While the attention to detail here is impressive, there is one obvious question that springs to mind about the Warthog. What happens if you're playing a game that doesn't involve A-10s? The stick feels lovely in *Wings of Prey*, for example, but a lot of the switches will obviously be redundant when you're flying a Spitfire.

I'm pretty sure that if you've just shelled out the best part of £300 on a joystick, you'll find a way to make it work, mind. And while the Saitek X-65F set-up is even more highly configurable, the Warthog has the geekier appeal. ■

VERDICT

Ridiculously real – and essential if you're a Warthog fan – it's still an impressive piece of kit for other sims too.

PC GAMER

88



SPEC ♦ Construction All metal ♦ Buttons 51 + 2 x POV hats ♦ Throttles Right & Left ♦ Total weight >6kg
♦ Link www.thrustmaster.com

Carbon GT

£40 Speedlink

Spending over £50 on a steering wheel might seem extravagant, but putting Speedlink's Carbon GT side-by-side with the Thrustmaster Ferrari F430 shows you what you get for the extra £30.

The Carbon GT is much lighter, and the pedals feel as though they might crack under your right foot when accelerating hard out of a corner. There's no force feedback either – which is just about acceptable in a flight stick, but not in a wheel.

On the positive side, the aggressive clamp and sucker system ensures that once the Carbon GT wheel unit is in position on your desk, nothing will move it unless you really intend it to shift.

Like many lower-end peripherals, the Carbon GT



tends to overcompensate for its inadequacies: the gear shift paddles are split in two so there are more buttons to program, but changing gear requires a little more accuracy than you might care for.

While it's not terrible, the GT is hard to recommend. If you have decided you want a wheel, you'll almost certainly be expecting the kind of experience that is unfortunately going to cost a bit more. ■

PC GAMER
68

SPEC ♦ Wheel diameter 28cm ♦ Feedback Rumble ♦ Connection USB
♦ Buttons 10 plus D-pad ♦ Link www.speedlink.com

MFD Cougar

£60 Thrustmaster

If you have to ask what these are, then you almost certainly don't need them. Thrustmaster's MFD Cougar units are (apparently) replicas of multifunction display screens taken from the inside of USAF aircraft.

Sadly, there's no actual display panel in these USB devices, but there are two per pack and each has 20 programmable buttons around the outside, along with four rocker switches.

To complete the illusion of being in an aircraft without ever leaving your desk, you can insert LCD panels, which many flight sim programs will recognise and feed with appropriate images.



Otherwise, there are cardboard cutouts of radar screens and map overlays that serve a more useful function: labels for the buttons.

You don't really get more niche as far as controllers go, so it's understandable that they're so expensive. But it's also a shame; it'd be amusing to play around with them as, say, an auxiliary controller for Adam Jensen's augs. ■

PC GAMER
81

SPEC ♦ Number of panels 2 ♦ Buttons 20 per panel plus 4 switches
♦ Backlit Programmable LED ♦ Connection USB ♦ Link www.thrustmaster.com

MaxFire Grandias

£22 Genius

Wireless gamepads aren't quite as essential for the PC as they are for a console – after all, you're never that far from your desk.

But when they cost more or less the same as a wired version, like the Genius MaxFire Grandias, what have you got to lose? It's ridiculously easy to set up and configure, too. Just push the USB dongle in, turn the controller on and you're good to go. It's entirely driverless, and the battery life seems pretty decent too.

Likewise there are no issues with transceiver power – even with the dongle plugged into a rear USB port, there's no discernible lag or unusual interference to interrupt play.



Build quality is surprisingly good for a budget controller. It's one of the more solid gamepads I've tested, and feels even more robust than Microsoft's Xbox 360 pad, if slightly less well suited to a large-palmed hand. The only concern is that the sticks are a bit stiff, and they feel like they might loosen up – in a bad way – over time.

However, at this price, it's still one of the best ways to get wireless control. ■

PC GAMER
82

SPEC ♦ Wireless 2.3GHz RF ♦ Force feedback Rumble ♦ Connection USB
♦ Buttons 12 ♦ Sticks 2 ♦ Link www.genius-europe.com

Cessna Pro Flight Bundle

£439 Saitek

The branded controls of a Cessna light aircraft might sound more niche even than Thrustmaster's Warthog cockpit, but this kit from Saitek is surprisingly adaptable.

There are three parts: the wheel and three-way lever control, foot pedals, and a trim wheel. Each is available separately, and the main dash kit alone is around £200. Despite the fact it looks a bit plasticky, it's well built – even the pedals, which don't photograph well, turn out to be pleasingly tough.

The wheel is designed for commercial aircraft rather than military sims, but if you set it up right it makes a refreshing change from the usual combat



flight rig. There are even buttons where the triggers should be, if you fancy that sort of laid-back fighting.

I wasn't expecting to like the Cessna kit as much as I actually do. It's obviously not going to come a long way out of its niche, but if you want something that doesn't feel as aggressive but gives you more control options than a standard stick, this should fit the bill. ■

PC GAMER
84

SPEC ♦ Construction Metal shaft ♦ Buttons 16 +POV hats ♦ Throttles 3 levers
♦ Extras Trim wheel and pedals ♦ Link www.saitek.com

ON TEST

REVIEWS

Our definitive guide to the latest gaming hardware. **By Adam Oxford**

TESTING CRITERIA

Components and materials > A piece of kit is quite literally the sum of its parts. We look for the fastest chips, the highest core counts and the most modern materials.

Real-world performance > Each piece of kit we look at must be examined on its own merits. If it's a mouse, how does it

feel? Is it too heavy or light? If it's a memory stick, an item designed for portability, how much data can it hold? Does it read and write data quickly? **Attractiveness** > Some kit looks good, some looks bad. Aesthetics are taken into account as it can be a factor in your long-term satisfaction. **Value** > It may be the best-performing piece of kit in its category, but is it affordable?

IPS236V

£145 LG

Some very good IPS monitors have passed through the PC Gamer labs recently, and at some reasonable prices too. Viewsonic's VP2365wb was a real bargain for around £200, yet LG's IPS236V is the most promising of all.

Officially priced at less than £150, and available for under £130 at some sites, it's almost unbelievably cheap for a screen technology that would have cost three times that for a similarly sized 23inch panel just a couple of years ago. On top of that, it's got a modern LED backlight, rather than the traditional CCFL tube, which means it's ridiculously

"It has one of the best on-screen displays for setting up preferences that I've ever seen"

thin and uses less than 40W at full brightness too.

It also has one of the best on-screen displays for setting up colour and brightness preferences I've ever seen: four touch-sensitive buttons whose contextual operations are marked clearly above them when one is pressed.

What of the screen itself? IPS is an acronym for in-plane switching, a method of controlling the liquid crystals in an LCD display that results in better colour quality and viewing angles than rival technology,

but generally means lower refresh rates.

The good news is that the IPS panel in the LG has no discernible lag. It's rated, like most eIPS screens, at 14ms, but there are no signs of ghosting or motion blur. Input lag is fractionally more than the Viewsonic, but again not enough to be noticeable to any but the most highly attuned pro gamer.

What's not so great, however, is the picture quality. It has wonderfully inky blacks and excellent viewing angles, but it lacks the richness of the Viewsonic or any of Dell's IPS screens. With some careful gamma tuning and calibration tweaking, you can get it close, but it never has quite the same lush accuracy and range that other IPS screens boast, which is almost certainly as a result of the LED backlight.

Add in the fact that the stand isn't height adjustable and the bezel is a bit too thick to be ideal for multiscreen play and there's a danger of feeling disappointed by the LG – which is silly, when you get back to how much it costs. It's not the best IPS screen, but it is astonishingly good for £145.

If you have the extra £60 to spend on the Viewsonic, or you can stretch to a Dell U2412M, then they are worth it. If you can't, there's almost no reason to choose any other budget monitor over this one. ■

VERDICT

Needs care to tune the colours and brightness, but this monitor offers awesome potential for the price.

PC GAMER
88



Visit
www.techradar.co.uk/reviews
to find the latest,
best prices.

SPEC ♦ Size 23inch ♦ Resolution 1920x1080 ♦ Technology IPS ♦ Response time 5ms
♦ Contrast ratio 1000:1 ♦ Inputs VGA, DVI, HDMI ♦ Link www.lg.com

ATH-T500

£60 Audio-Technica

This outsized headset isn't designed for gaming, but when you're buying a new headset, do you want the one with the most colourful logo and skull-shattering bass or do you value the quality of its audio reproduction more? That should be a facetious question, but too many 'gaming' headsets are hugely overpriced and sound awful.

The ATH-T500 is half the price of many purportedly top-quality gaming headsets, and yet sounds much, much better than nearly all of them. The large, closed-back cuffs completely shut out the rest of the world and lock you into a soundscape that's rich without being too bassy, and which has plenty of range for treble and placing spatial effects.

You don't get an inline volume control, but the thick cable does look like it'll take a fair bit of abuse. More importantly, it's long enough to reach the back of your PC, even if it's tucked away by your feet. The fact that there's no mic might be a bit of a



concern: it's not that adding a clip-on mic is expensive, but it can be a chore if you play mostly with Ventrilo running in the background.

For single-player games, though, the ATH-T500 sounds wonderful and is even more comfortable than the SteelSeries Siberia V2, which won last month's headphone round-up. It has a similar suspended headband design, but softer cuffs and a more rugged support in the middle.

So, unless you really want headphones with a glowing logo, you should try the ATH-T500 out.



SPEC ♦ Speaker size 53mm ♦ Frequency response 10-25000Hz ♦ Sensitivity 106dB/mW
♦ Impedance 400ohms ♦ Cable 3m ♦ Weight 270g ♦ Link www.audio-technica.com

G400

£35 Logitech

Logitech's MX518 was a seminal mouse. Its slightly banana-shaped body infuriated left-handed players, but its design became the basis for Logitech's hugely successful G-Series of gaming mice. Now it's been retired and replaced with the G400.

This mouse is pretty much identical to its forebear in every way except for an upgrade to the sensor, which increases the maximum DPI from 1,800 to 3,600. You can change the DPI on the fly using the buttons by the scroll wheel, and you can program custom sensitivities, along with macro controls, using Logitech's G-Series drivers.

The body shape is still the same, but because the plastic feels thinner, the G400 feels lighter than the MX518, although it weighs the same.

The cable is slightly thinner too, but overall, Logitech have kept the look and feel of the classic line. The



new sensor is designed to ape the old one in terms of tracking, for example, although it polls at 1000Hz compared to the MX518's original 125Hz rate.

It's a shame they didn't take the opportunity to improve the mouse wheel, though, which feels too light and narrow, yet sticky, even though other mice in the G-Series have improved the placement of the sensitivity buttons since the MX518's debut back in 2005.

Logitech have produced a mouse that doesn't mess with the tried and tested. It'll sell well, though, because at £35, it's excellent value.



♦ Sensitivity 400-3,600DPI ♦ Processing 5.8Mp/s ♦ Max acceleration 25G ♦ USB report rate 1000Hz
♦ Weight 106g ♦ Cable 2.05m ♦ Link www.logitech.com

KIT FILTER



BenQ W1200 £1,250

If you're looking for a projector capable of throwing a seven-and-a-half-metre picture up on the side of your house, in full 1080p HD resolution, you can't do a lot better than the W1200 for this price. The plasticky body doesn't look like over £1,000 worth of projector, but the picture quality is superb. Your 24inch screen will seem pretty cramped when you go back to it.

88

www.benq.com



thinksound TS02 £55

These wooden buds (from renewable sources) have a beautifully warm sound that's almost perfectly balanced for gaming, and on a par with many full-sized headsets at the same price. Thanks to the inline mic, they'll also work with your phone. Further boosting the eco-credentials are the PVC-free cabling, cotton pouch and use of recycled cardboard for the packaging.

90

www.amp3.co.uk



MiniStation Plus £80

USB 3.0 is becoming the interface of choice for external hard drives, and it's easy to find an external drive that can make use of the massive 5Gb/s transfer rates. Buffalo's MiniStation Plus is one. It's not the smallest external drive, but it's pocket-sized and ultra-fast. Best of all, you can pick one up for around £80, which is more than reasonable for a 1TB drive.

89

www.buffalo-technology.com

The PC Gamer Rig

It's back and better value than ever. Meet our ultimate component guide.

There's one question you should ask yourself when choosing a new gaming PC for the winter season: what would PC Gamer do? It's a question that is applicable in many life scenarios, of course, from choosing a joystick to selecting a spouse. But never more relevant than here.

What we would do is set ourselves a strict budget, an absolute maximum of £1,000, for which we would expect to be able to buy everything. Having done that, we'd select

the best value components known to man, always making sure that however much money we save it's not at the expense of the machine's longevity.

And we'd come up with something like the PC Gamer Rig. A PC against which all others are compared, carefully maintained and updated only when components meet the sweet spot of performance and price.

This month, for example, there is no change in the Rig's basic make-up. Always a quiet time for PC hardware, the last few

weeks of summer have been especially unexciting. There's plenty on the way – AMD's Bulldozer CPU and Graphics Core Next 3D card may yet find their way inside – but for now, the Rig abides. ■

Adam

Adam Oxford
Hardware Editor



Total price
£886

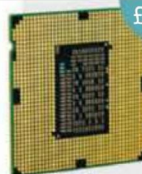
THE PC GAMER RIG

CPU

Intel Core i5 2500K

An unlocked Sandy Bridge quad core, with everything but hyperthreading included.

FITTED November



£156

3D CARD

XFX Radeon 6870 Black

You can get faster cards, but this has plenty of poke to power a single 1920x1080 display.

FITTED November



£138

MOTHERBOARD

Gigabyte Z68AP-D3

An awesome Z68 board, with mSATA connectors for mini SSDs and Intel's caching technology.

FITTED November



£92

POWER SUPPLY

Cooler Master 80+

A decent 650W PSU that's rated well for efficiency. The minimum you should try to get away with.

FITTED November



£70

RAM

Crucial Ballistic Sport

Eight gigabytes of fast 1600MHz DDR3 for £50. Grab it quick, just in case it's a misprint.

FITTED November



£50

MONITOR

LG IPS236V

Astonishingly low price for an IPS screen, and the LED backlight means it hardly takes up any space.

FITTED November



£155

CASE

BitFenix Shinobi

Easy access to all components and not too noisy. Looks better than other budget cases, too.

FITTED November



£50

KEYBOARD

Cherry CyMotion Expert

The CyMotion looks a little meh, but has a beautiful gaming action.

FITTED November



£20

HARD DRIVE

Samsung Spinpoint F4

A massive two terabyte drive at a remarkable price, and high density platters for top performance too.

FITTED November



£57

MOUSE

Logitech G400

Classic Logitech style in a brand new design, this 3600dpi mouse is comfortable and precise.

FITTED November



£40

DVD DRIVE

LG GH22NP21

Fast DVD writers are pretty generic these days, and it's not really worth spending the extra for Blu-ray.

FITTED November



£18

HEADSET

Corsair HS1A

Good quality sound at a reasonable price. Easily one of the best sub-£50 headsets.

FITTED November



£40



INTRODUCING THE CORSAIR

Carbide Series™ 400R

Full-Featured Mid-Tower Gaming Case

Designed with everything you need. And nothing you don't.

Designed for the future

The Carbide Series™ 400R includes two USB 3.0 connectors on the front panel, connected directly to compatible motherboards. And the tool-free 3.5" drive trays are SSD-ready, so you can install 2.5" drives without extra adapters.

Designed with room to grow

High-performance gaming systems need lots of room to work with. Want to build a triple-GPU monster? The Carbide 400R has eight PCI-Express slots and room for extended-length GPUs of up to 316mm. There's even space for extra-long power supplies.

Designed to run cool

With mounting points for up to ten fans, getting the airflow right is a breeze. The Carbide 400R comes with three 120mm fans installed — one exhaust fan at the rear and two intake fans up front — so you get great cooling right out of the box.

And if liquid cooling is your thing, there's room for a 2 x 120mm radiator at the top of the case.

Brilliantly designed, inside and out

The beauty on the inside goes beyond the all-black interior. Corsair's innovative cable management system provides a straightforward way to route cables behind the motherboard for a clean, uncluttered system. And since looks are an important part of any build, you'll appreciate the ability to turn off the fan LEDs with the push of a button.



The new Carbide Series 400R Mid-Tower Gaming Case. Designed for you. Learn lots more at corsair.com/carbide

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MEMORY



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EXTRA LIFE

GET MORE FROM YOUR GAMING

NOW PLAYING



John Sinamoi. Tough taskmaster. Good with a pipe.

THE PC GAMER TEAM



TOMS



OWEN



TIMS



TOM H



TOM F

"It's time for plan B: desperate random screaming and slashing"

FACING CERTAIN DEATH IN A QUEST FOR VITAMIN C ON **DEAD ISLAND**

Tom Senior

Now Playing: *Dead Island*

This month: Braved the most inconvenient convenience store ever conceived.

Also played: *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*



A hidden menace lurks behind the horror of *Dead Island*'s undead invasion. The dreadful spectre of vitamin C deficiency. Scurvy would not be high on my list of worries in the aftermath of a zombie apocalypse, but who am I to argue? I'm just a high-heeled lady with a cleaver and resistance to zombification.

The real leader here is head survivor NPC John Sinamoi. He knows what he's doing. Probably. But when he asks me to go out into the zombie-infested wilderness for orange juice, it's hard to take him seriously. Partly because my co-op partner Tom Hatfield has wedged himself between me and John and is squatting up and down like a loon, but mostly because what *the hell?*

It's OK. We're pros. Tom H has got a big stick. We can do it. Where's the juice? "Up in the hills." Oh, you mean the incredibly dangerous hills we were told never to visit because we would need an armoured car to survive? Right.

We take a pickup truck instead and power our way uphill, swerving into roadside zombies at every opportunity. The objective marker is far beyond the beachfronts we've explored before. It leads us to an abandoned convenience store, where we crash through the zombie hordes shambling in front and dive out, weapons ready.

The undead are everywhere. Outside the store there's a huge pool of sparking, electrified water. A hideous "Uuuuuuuugh!" comes from within. It's a Thug, one of *Dead Island*'s toughest creatures.

We slash through the hordes, fighting our way inside with a barrage of flying kicks. It is dark. We proceed carefully, weapons at the ready. A drinks machine hums quietly. The place seems deserted. Perhaps there

isn't anything in here after- "Uuuuuuuugh!"

Oh God it's behind me. **SMACK.** I'm sent flying across the room.

"I'm coming!" shouts Hatfield. He charges the eight-foot creature and whacks it

"There comes a time when a man must choose between orange juice and his friends"

uselessly with his plank. "It's not working!" he cries. As I stand up, I spot four boxes of juice. I start lugging one towards the door. The Thug throws Hatfield across the room as I waddle slowly past with my prize.

Outside, I dump it in the truck. "I've got the juice!" I say. "I'm dying!" screams Hatfield.

There comes a time in every zombie apocalypse when a man must choose

between orange juice and his friends. I linger beside the driver's seat of the truck for a moment. Could I just... drive away?

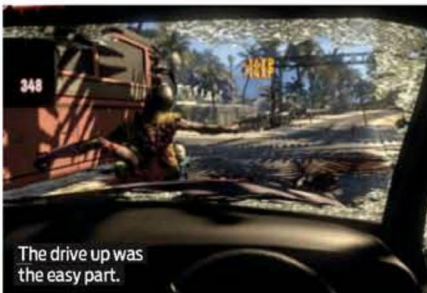
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RELEASED September 2011

OUR REVIEW PCG 232, 82%

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No! I quick-select my finest cleaver and charge back into the darkness, to finish the Thug once and for all. I see it towering over Hatfield, slowly moving in for the kill. I dive at it, activating a high-powered backstab right into its spine. The monster doesn't even react.

Time for plan B: desperate random screaming and slashing. The Thug slowly turns around, enormous arm pulled back for a savage swing. Hatfield limps away from the distracted creature. I dodge around it and we both back out of the doorway into the light.

"Get in the truck! Get in the truck!" shouts Hatfield. We're barely outpacing the monster behind us. It emerges into the sun and roars. We dive into the front seats. I gun the engine and throw the vehicle into reverse, flattening the Thug with a dull whump. Everything is quiet. The floor is slick with giblets. The electrified water fizzes quietly. We've done it.

"Uuuuuuuugh!"

How is it not dead? "We've got the juice, just go!" I oblige. We skid out of the car park and bomb down the hill away from the convenience store. Our work here is done. Tonight, the living citizens of Banoi Island will drink Tequila Sunrises. ☹

Running into choke points is my speciality.



"Sometimes I feel like an infant in an airport mini-arcade"

PRETENDING TO PLAY COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

Owen Hill

Now Playing: *Counter-Strike: Source*

This month: Denied lack of skills. Acknowledged lack of skills. Got shot.

Also Played: *Bastion*



There's no point denying it. I suck at *Counter-Strike*.

Actually, maybe I don't suck. Maybe everyone else is really, really good. I played a few years ago and I sucked, yes. But I was young. I didn't know tactics. My mouse probably had a ball in it for God's sake. But now I'm back. Back in de_dust getting my head splattered over dated textures.

"At least it's balanced" I think as a twitch-fiend's pixel-perfect aim leads a bullet into my cranium. I don't even get a shot off.

That guy was unbelievably good actually. The spectator cam gives me time to think. He's probably clocked 800 hours. He's probably the leader of a clan or the editor of

a *Counter-Strike* fan site or something. Maybe I'm just average. Maybe I'm on the wrong server for my skill level.

"I did get a kill a few rounds ago," I think. A real kill. After all, this is a bona-fide sport, and I'm a beginner. "This is as pure as FPS get," I think as I jump, crouch, and fire through a doorway. Rich taught me that move. I don't hit anyone or even see an enemy's silhouette before pulling the trigger, but it makes me feel a bit like a badass. Only occasionally though. Sometimes I feel like an infant in an airport's mini-arcade, sitting in a Sega Rally cabinet, pretending to drive.

Actually, I can't suck that bad because I'm not even playing. I'm pretending to play. I may as well embrace my role.

For the first moments of each match I'm quite convincing: I shadow my teammates closely. Then, as they get closer to danger, I extend my distance. Sometimes I'll follow a skilled shooter all through the level until he's cleaned it up, like I'm making a fly-on-the-wall American police documentary. I'm a voyeur. And I suck at *Counter-Strike*. ☹

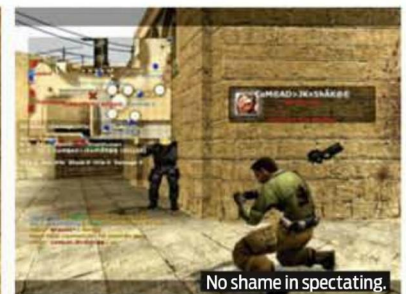
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RELEASED November 2004

OUR REVIEW PCG 142, 91%

BUT IT bit.ly/NCwTy, £13.99

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“A single cloud shadow can screw up an otherwise perfect shot”

TIM STONE SWAPS LEAD FOR LIGHT IN **THE HUNTER**

Tim Stone

Now Playing: *The Hunter*
This month: Snapped twigs, mountains and moth-eaten monarchs of the glen.
Also played: *OMSI* – *Der Omnibussimulator*



It was around a fortnight ago that I realised something had changed. Kills in online deer-stalking sim *The Hunter* that had once made my heart sing and my breast swell had begun to feel flat, pointless, cruel even. I was enjoying strolling through the dappled glades and searching for the skittish stags as much as ever, but the actual act of slaying – the moment of squeezing the trigger and watching the quarry crumple – had lost its magic.

The solution came to me during a stroll through a real dappled glade: I'd put my guns in the ground. I'd trade my Remington for a Nikon!

The switch worked a treat. My low-key love affair with *The Hunter* is rekindled. I find shooting deer with a camera more

satisfying, more challenging and much easier on the conscience.

In the old days located prey was usually dead prey. Because my lead emissions were as effective at 220 metres as 20, I didn't need to get close. Now, as I'm not interested in images that are mostly swaying grass or shadow-striped forest floor, I must sneak to within spitting distance of restless ungulates. I've become a puma.

Of course, proximity is only half the challenge. Getting close enough to a deer to see the (metaphorical) teasels caught in its fur, or the (metaphorical) flies buzzing round its cartilaginous crown, is no good if that deer is deep in shade or pointing its posterior at the lens. The would-be wildlife photographer must consider light, pose, and composition. He must search for vantage points that are free from tall grass and unsightly deer dung. Even then a single unanticipated hoofstep or cloud shadow can screw up an otherwise perfect shot.

What is a perfect shot? For me it's Sir Edwin Landseer's 'Monarch of the Glen'

executed with pixels rather than paint. For the last couple of weeks I've been rambling around the stunningly pretty Logger's Point trying to find truly majestic stags. Once found I attempt to manoeuvre myself so that these beasts stand against spectacular

“I must sneak within spitting distance of restless ungulates. I've become a puma”

backgrounds: mountains, cloudscapes, wild flower meadows.

As the above image testifies, I haven't had much luck so far. I've got decent pics of does and fawns. I've even snatched some acceptable images of wild pigs and pheasants, but for some reason my portraits of bucks tend to be gloomy, awkward, or dominated by retreating

rumps. Maybe I can learn something from Landseer's technique.

Ah. It seems he shot his stag before painting it. 🐾

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"This is not the first time he has lashed out at his reflection"

HOME BITTERSWEET HOME IN DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

Tom Hatfield

Now Playing: *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*

This month: Made a mess of his flat... and in the game.

Also played: *Dead Island*, *Supreme Commander*



Deus Ex: Human Revolution contains my favourite place in any game I've ever played. Adam Jensen's apartment is character-study-as-location. His entire emotional journey can be found within its hastily unpacked boxes. Not convinced? Let me take you on a tour.

As we enter, the blinds automatically open, but carefully so, slowing spilling rays of soft light through their slats. The imagery is clearly inspired by Deckard's apartment in Blade Runner, and it shows *Deus Ex*'s golden sheen at its best: beautiful yet grubby, futuristic and sepia tinted all at once.

The first thing we notice is the mess. Boxes lie around, not yet unpacked, cigarettes are stubbed out, half-eaten sandwiches litter the tables. Adam is a man in transition from one stage of

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his life to the next, and he has yet to commit to his new circumstances.

In the bathroom hangs a shattered mirror, broken from an impact in the centre. A small note is attached to it, reminding Adam to ask his landlady for a new one. The emails on his PC make it abundantly clear that this is not the first time Adam has lashed out at his own reflection.

Another email reveals that Kubrick, the dog he and Megan kept when they lived together, was put down during his hospitalisation.

The apartment expresses how Adam's life was shattered in the attack on Sarif Industries, but on a workbench in the front room, something different is happening.

Careful sketches are pinned to the walls, while a nearby ebook inform us that Adam has become fascinated with clockwork. It seems he is constructing a mechanism of his own design. It is clear that he has been working hard at this, even while he fails to unpack the remnants of his former life.

Even as the old Adam is being discarded, a new one is being built among the ruins. One of gleaming golden clockwork.



"Confused in an empty room, I started bashing the cage"

BASTION TEACHES US THAT IT'S GOOD TO TALK

Tom Francis

Now Playing: *Bastion*
This month: Realised things by hearing a man saying he realised them.
Also played: *Space Marine*, *Dead Island*



Bastion is the game with the narrator: a man who sounds like he's seen things describes what's going on in an Old West drawl. I thought it'd be funny, and it is. Take an unnecessary hit in combat, and the narrator reflects that "Kid maybe shouldna done what he did."

It's also unexpectedly useful. So much of the bullshit in games comes from the difficulty of communicating the situation to the player – can I open that door? Should I be going this

way? Is that cage a thing I can smash, or am I waiting for a boss to appear?

It turns out that one way to communicate this stuff to the player is to just say it, aloud. Confused in an empty room, I started bashing the cage containing the core I needed to get to. "Cage like that couldn't be broke, but the kid whaled on it anyhow."

OK, I'm doing the wrong thing. And it didn't take a popup message, an unfair death or minutes of frustration to learn it. The game just saw what I was trying, told me it wouldn't work, and made me laugh too.

It turned out the cage would open of its own accord, slowly, while enemies poured in. By levelling with me and telling me how it works, the game let me understand the situation and enjoy it.

So many games are so bad at communicating their rules, that frankly, most of them should just copy *Bastion*.

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RELEASED September 2011
OUR REVIEW PCG 232, 92%
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The unstoppable creep

AS THE BIGGEST PROFESSIONAL **STARCRAFT II** TEAMS CLASH IN KOREA, AN UNKNOWN PLAYER STUNS THE CROWDS

The stakes are high, the battles have been fast and furious, and now StarTale may be about to blow it all because of a fat comedy vampire in a cape.

It's the GSL Team League, a huge and long-running *StarCraft II* tournament in Korea where

READ ME

WHO?

StarTaleBomber (Korea) vs NSHoSeoSeal (Korea)

WHERE AND WHEN?

Global StarCraft II Team League Season 1, July 22

VOD LINK

bit.ly/SealBomb (Game 6 – requires season pass)

pro-gaming teams pick one player each to go head-to-head with another. If that player loses, he can't play again in that match, so choosing who to put up against the enemy first is critical.

Initially, StarTale, a team comprising some of the most fearsome players on the planet, chose to put out a grinning buffoon in a velvet vampire cape. They were mocking their underdog opponents, NS HoSeo.

HoSeo dispatched him easily, and then put in Sculp. Who's Sculp? It turns out Sculp is the guy who can destroy StarTale's spectacular Protoss player Squirtle and Zerg player July, the champion they call the God of War.

Finally, StarTale brought out their real star, Terran champion Bomber. He took out Sculp.

But to avoid a humiliating defeat for his team, he also has to beat whoever HoSeo put out next. HoSeo bring out Seal. Who's Seal?

Pretty soon, everyone is going to know who Seal is.

Let battle commence

00.00 A quiet start as both players build their economies. Commentators Tasteless and Artosis fill the downtime with seal jokes.

2.00 Bomber builds his first barracks on a nearby cliff. Tasteless and Artosis attempt to sing Seal's 'Kiss from a Rose' without accurately remembering any of the lyrics.

3.00 Seal sends a worker over to Bomber's base to see what he's doing. Since the barracks is hidden on a cliff, he sees exactly what you see if your opponent has secretly built their barracks close to your own base for a sudden attack. Uh oh.

3.30 Bomber starts building a bunker in Seal's base. With the possibility of a hidden barracks nearby, this is a terrifying combination for Seal. And that's the point: Bomber wants Seal to stop building his economy and send everything to stop this bunker. If he does, it'll cost him so much that Bomber will get ahead economically. The illusion of an attack is almost as effective as attacking, and requires little investment.

4.00 Seal doesn't bite. He sends four workers, a paltry number, to kill the one who is building Bomber's barracks. Bomber has no choice but

to cancel it – his bluff has been called.

8.00 Bomber has reverted to expanding in an incredibly cautious style. His whole team's success depends on him winning this match, and he leaves no window for Seal to attack.

Seal drifts a floating Overlord into Bomber's base to see what he's up to, and prepares to build Banelings and Mutalisks. Banelings can explode themselves to destroy huge numbers of Terran Marines, and Mutalisks are fast flying units that can raid any undefended base.

9.00 Something strange is happening to the minimap: it's turning purple. Seal's tumours dot the terrain, spreading a fleshy carpet of 'creep' that allows Zerg units to move faster and see what happens on it. It's a neat trick, but one few professional Zerg players bother with: each tumour has to be placed manually, and they've got other stuff to click on.

10.00 The creep is coating the beaches, lining the sea bed, smothering the vegetation. The commentators are in shock. Tasteless almost swears on air.

10.30 Bomber moves out, and the creep means Seal spots him immediately. Suddenly, Bomber is under attack – not from the Zerg base, but from behind. Seal's Mutalisks have swung



round to ambush him, and they take out an expensive tank before retreating.

11.10 For a while, Seal lets Bomber pound one of his new bases. Then, when it's almost destroyed, he sends everything.

Oddly, his Banelings roll past Marines they could easily kill and towards the heavily armoured tanks. Marines do decent damage to them as they give chase, and it looks like a mistake – until Seal doubles back.

The Banelings *smash* the marines in explosions of corrosive goo, and they do it right in the middle of Bomber's tanks. With no marines left, the damaged tanks are defenceless against the flying Mutalisks, and the attack is obliterated.

13.30 Seal's creep keeps spreading until it covers almost the entire map. The commentators have become obsessed with it. "It is the only thing that matters in my life,"

Artosis says. "I don't care about you, Tasteless. I don't care about my family."

19.00 The first big clash between the two players happens in the middle of the map. Both micromanage their mixed armies excellently, and the result is a draw: the Terran is left with a diminished land army, while the Zerg loses everything on the ground but keeps his valuable Mutalisks alive.

20.30 As Bomber's surviving marines move on, two burrowed Infestors wriggle toward them, unseen under the sand. They burst out and cast Fungal Growth: a horrible plague that paralyses and eats away at the entire platoon. At the moment they strike, a swarm of cheap Zerglings swoops in. Bomber has siege tanks on the high ground that automatically shell them, but the splash damage incinerates his own wounded Marines. As Pyrrhic victories go, it's brutally efficient.

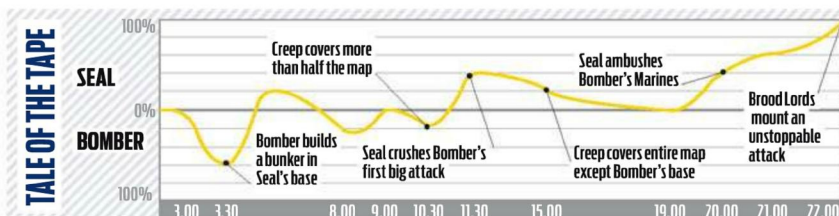
21.00 Eight Brood Lords are morphing.

22.30 Brood Lords are the Zerg race's star unit: flying manta rays that fire nibbling little horrors called Broodlings at their foes. Once Seal has them, he attacks.

They're a game-changer: Bomber can't hold a defensive line because Brood Lords can float ominously out of range and fire endless streams of Broodlings at him. He's forced to send his Marines out to attack them, at which point Seal's Infestors trap them with Fungal growth, and his Mutalisks can finish them off. Seal's been very careful with his Mutalisks so far, so he still has a huge swarm of them left. This is where that pays off: Mutalisks can attack both ground and air units, so they swoop in to engage the Marines and Viking fliers that would otherwise shred Seal's much more powerful Brood Lords.

Once Seal breaks into Bomber's base, his Infestors start spitting out dozens and dozens of green globs. They hatch into Infested Terrans – marines, but working for the Zerg.

It's the last straw for Bomber. With his base swamped with zombie versions of his own units and his army in tatters, he 'gg's and leaves the game. Despite fielding the best man against a player no one had heard of, StarTale have lost the whole match. Well, we've heard of him now. 🐛



OUTSIDE THE BLOCKS

JAZ MCDUGALL TRADES HIS PICK FOR A SWORD IN THE **MINECRAFT** ADVENTURE UPDATE

I've never played a game that let you run this fast for this long and still called it sprinting. I'd have called it the gazelle button. *Minecraft* 1.8 is the first of a series of patches that developers Mojang are calling the Adventure Update. But combined with the breathtaking vistas *Minecraft* generates, the sprint ability alone is enough to justify the name.

It's about time there was some incentive to venture beyond your blocky battlements.

Minecraft has always concerned itself with building, so that every feature is balanced around the experience of making and unmaking. The day/night cycle made it a race to build shelter and light before the sun went down that first night. Items dropped by monsters and wildlife were added to enrich your underground experience. You delved further into your back yard for wool, leather, bones or meat. The game never actively encouraged you to go anywhere

new, just to expand your centre, your fortress, your home.

Walkabout

After two months of development – lengthy for *Minecraft* – the Adventure Update has arrived. And it's all about getting out of your neighbourhood. New monsters, combat and movement updates, terrain features and much larger climate zones (biomes) come together to transform the experience.

A feature breakdown doesn't quite do it justice: this is more than just a list of new blocks (window panes!) and features (cows drop steak!). The adventure update has added a new dimension to *Minecraft*. On the server I

play on, we've agreed to start from scratch in order to fully enjoy the exploration aspect. The new systems mean that we'll have to band together before we can afford to split apart, that we'll need to escort each other on journeys, that we'll need to organise food, and that we'll find more breathtaking locations for our citadels and fortresses than ever before.

As mentioned, you can sprint for a long while, but not forever. Your new food bar, a little row of ten meat haunches, will steadily decrease as you move around the world in any difficulty level harder than 'Peaceful.' When it's full, you heal automatically – and there's no other way

"When you look directly at Endermen, their heads whip round, their jaws swing open, and they stare at you, shaking with rage"



to regain health. By sprinting and jumping, you drain it faster. Even without doing anything strenuous, by the second day without food, your blocky belly will be rumbling. Below three haunches and you can no longer sprint. Once your food bar completely empties, your health begins to drain. On Easy, it stops draining at five hearts; on normal, it'll stop an inch from death at a half heart. On Hard mode, it doesn't stop until you're dead.

The act of murder is also much improved. *Minecraft* now lets you do double damage when you attack something while you're falling through the air. Most monsters will die in two of these critical hits. It lets you manage larger hordes of the undead, and gives a rhythm to the frantic click-spamming of previous combat versions. Shots with the bow can now be

charged for critical hits of their own, and arrows stick in monsters too.

The Endermen join the classic crew of night-spawned monsters. They are tall, gangly, midnight-skinned creatures who slowly and arbitrarily move blocks around one at a time. When you look directly at them, their heads whip round, their jaws swing open, and they stare at you with their luminous green eyes, shaking with anger. When you break eye contact, they start chasing you, teleporting around and soaking up much damage. They offer variety, but they're not such a huge concern that you have to pay them special attention in a mob of nasties.

Abandoned mineshafts now spawn underground, venomous spiders crawling through their web-encrusted depths. These narrow, sparsely lit corridors are lined with wooden supports and the occasional treasure chest or minecart track. They're a natural evolution of the traditional dungeon of previous versions, which was little more than a room with a chest and some monsters. They can be extensive, so you have to mark your way with torches to avoid getting lost.

Biome sweet biome

The terrain generator offers the most dramatic change. Biomes are much larger now, and this gives them space to take form and become true locales in the fabric of your world. What would once have been a hilly lump between a patch of desert and a pond-like ocean is now a mountain range.

Rivers carve valleys through many biomes, empty villages are scattered through the land, and deep ravines incise the earth, revealing caves and ore aplenty. On that note, there seems to be a lot more in the way of iron ore now, which is good. I never felt like I could spare enough even to make an iron suit of armour before – now I can make a backup set, iron tools, and minecart tracks besides.

Or, if you prefer, you can just become invincible and fly around the place. In the new Creative Mode, you can still see plenty of monsters and delve around in their creepy underground lairs, but this way you can just waft right through the ceiling if you get creeped out. It's the best way to be a tourist in *Minecraft*, sampling the craggy mountains in their increased splendour, whizzing over giant oceans, building obsidian space stations on a whim, and tormenting creepers with a fishing rod. It's very easy, obviously, but great fun.

Minecraft's world is now dangerous, distinctive, and ripe for plunder. In a few patches' time, Mojang will stop adding new features to the game and start polishing for the official release date, November the 18th. It's already a more remarkable and exciting place to explore than it ever has been. ♦

READ ME

FIRST REVIEWED
n/a

PUBLISHER
Mojang AB

DEVELOPER
In-house

REQUIRES
DX9 3D card, 1.5GHz
CPU, 1GB RAM

LINK
minecraft.net

COMMUNITY
minecraftforum.net

GHOST TOWN Take a tour of an empty village



1 Why not have a relaxing pray at the local church? Also a convenient watchtower.

2 The village well is a good source of water for slaughtering Endermen.

3 Feel free to raid the farms! The villagers certainly aren't using them.

4 Some larger houses have book cases and nice furniture inside. Steal them!



With critical hits, monsters are less hassle.



Oh, a village! I'm sure we'll find shelter there and no monsters at all.



Why do spiders always shove their spidery nature in your face?

Sprinting will help you jump these, if you're mad.



Creative Mode lets you get a good look at the world.



Caves and chasms are more dramatic now.



This mine shaft breached the sea floor.

Endermen are terrified of rejection. Don't look away!



Pig, one day, all of this will be yours. Not really.

UNDYING

TOM SENIOR ON WHY **LEFT 4 DEAD 2** IS THE ZOMBIE CO-OP GAME THAT KEEPS ON LIVING

It's been nearly two years since the release of Valve's zombie survival sequel, *Left 4 Dead 2*. At the time, many accused Valve of abandoning the original; others worried the sequel would feel like an expansion pack with a price hike. But the huge new maps, new weapons and even nastier special infected proved that *L4D2* was worthy of that big extra digit. Ever since, Valve have been quietly updating both games with new maps, modes and mutations.

It's among the ten most-played games on Steam. Finding a session isn't hard: lobbies are populated within minutes, and there are always a few servers running for each map – even on the lower difficulties regular players left long ago. The AI director keeps it fresh, tailoring the zombie hordes to the mental state of the survivors, hitting them hardest when they're most confident, and toying with them when they're on the verge of death. And a series of weekly

mutations offer a different spin on *L4D2*'s increasingly familiar campaigns.

Mutant moments

One week, every survivor gets a chainsaw with unlimited gas. The next, every infected player in Versus spawns as a Tank. The mutation I've been playing recently, Hunting Party, replaces the zombie hordes and special infected with an army of pouncing Hunters. They come flying out of the shadows from every angle, but can be knocked back and shot by a well organised team. Hunters remain *Left 4 Dead*'s most terrifying and ineffectual enemies.

Yet Hunting Party plays out like many of *L4D2*'s mutations: initially hilarious but dull before long. A few have been great, but each is

only available for a week. Valve hold regular votes to let players temporarily bring back their favourites, but it would be nice to see each new ruleset added as a permanent option for server hosts who fancy a change. So far, only one has become a permanent fixture: the gruelling Realism version of the team-based Versus mode. Mutations such as Healing Gnome, in which the only way to recover is to hug a grinning gnome statue, should be available as an option at any time.

It would be even better if Valve let players customise the infected hordes and set weapon loadouts for survivors. That way players could

“Even on my hundredth time through Dead Air, the simple task of edging around a Witch turned into a battle for survival”



create and share their own favourite variants without restriction. If a group wants to see what happens when a team of Tanks faces off against four survivors with grenade launchers, why not let them? The restrictions on weekly mutations feel like an artificial attempt to expand *L4D2*'s lifespan, when what it really needs is more maps.

Thankfully, there's one in testing right now. Cold Stream is a four-stage campaign built by Matt L, the community mapper responsible for *L4D2*'s finest player-built campaign, 2 Evil Eyes. Valve are working on polishing it for a full release, but a beta is currently available for anyone to try. It's a bright and airy campaign that follows a stream as it winds through sewers, under bridges and into a series of rapids. It's bigger, more ambitious and more memorable than the dark and pokey areas in Valve's last release, The Passing, but for now

suffers from a few directionless zones and an anticlimactic final rush to the chopper.

It's striking how new these fresh areas make the game feel. If you've run through Dead Centre's burning hotels a hundred times, you'll know every angle of attack the infected are likely to use, you'll know the exact locations of all the possible weapon and health pack spawn points, and you'll likely have lost all sense of the story. After enough playthroughs, even the terrific dash across the exploding bridge of The Parish campaign loses its sense of drama. It becomes a technical exercise instead of a race for survival. New maps reintroduce the sense of discovery and unpredictability that fostered *Left 4 Dead*'s most memorable moments.

All four of the original *Left 4 Dead* campaigns – No Mercy, Death Toll, Dead Air and Blood Harvest – have been ported into the *L4D2* engine. You get to play as old favourites Bill, Zoey, Louis and Francis, with both the vastly improved weapons of the sequel and its more dangerous Special Infected. The old maps have been tidied for Versus play, exploits have been removed and certain areas subtly tweaked to make them more difficult (see Dead Fair).

Old fears

It's not just an exercise in nostalgia: the old maps are more focused and intense than the sequel's sprawling levels, and the addition of *L4D2*'s infected only makes them tougher. When a Smoker's tongue drags you screaming across a gangplank soured with burning Spitter mulch, you get an idea of how much more dangerous Dead Air has become.

Even on my hundredth time through the Dead Air car park, the simple task of edging around a witch turned into an all-out battle for survival. A Charger appeared, slamming me into a car. The alarm went off. The Witch attacked. The hordes rushed in. In a blaze of shattered Molotovs and machine-gun fire we fought off terrifying odds, picking each other up, tossing each other pain pills, wading through the horde to safety. Complete disaster has never been so much fun.

Most recently, a beta of Blood Harvest has entered circulation. *L4D*'s least colourful map is as punishing as ever on hardest difficulties. The fog and omnipresent tree cover make it all too easy to take a swipe from a hidden zombie. The map layout has barely changed in the transition between games, but Chargers and Jockeys give the infected even more ways to split the team up in the corn fields of the final chapter. In realism mode, that's now one of *L4D2*'s deadliest areas.

If you're considering jumping back into *L4D2*, then do. It still delivers moments of desperate chaos that are hugely fun to fight through. It's still a stunning co-op game. **T**

READ ME

FIRST REVIEWED
PCG 208, 92%

PUBLISHER
Valve

DEVELOPER
In-house

REQUIRES
3GHz CPU, ATI X800,
Nvidia 6600 3D card,
1GB RAM, 13GB HDD

LINK
bit.ly/4FSpt

COMMUNITY
bit.ly/b3JR

DEAD FAIR Dead Air's former exploits expunged

Camper's cupboard

The tiny cupboard on the edge of the map made things easy. New terrain gives the undead extra cover.

Lost luggage

You could once use explosives to move the cart, forming a path to the top of the plane. Now there's no way up.

Rubbergun

A ridiculous exploit that would let you bounce from the gun to the safety of the plane's wing has been fixed.

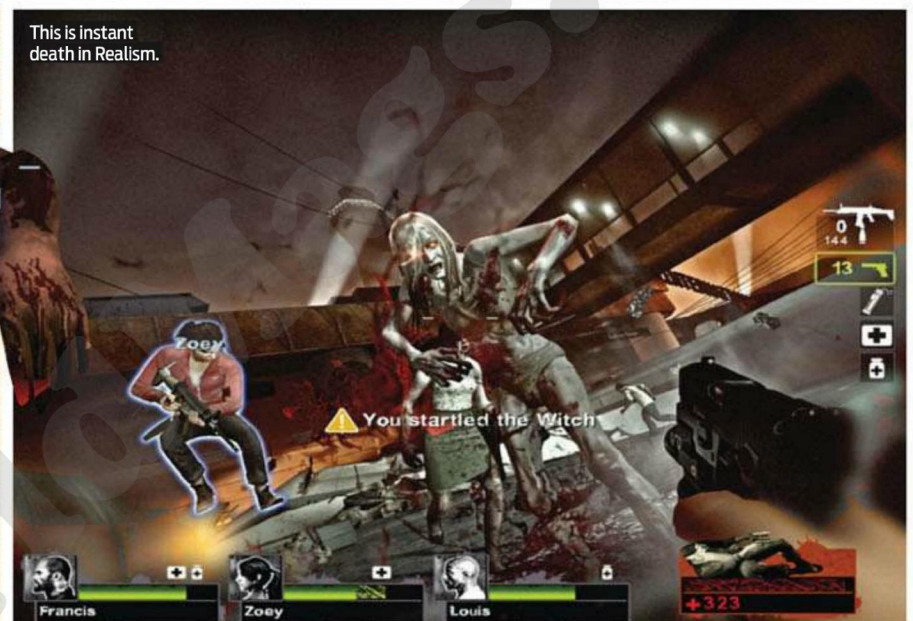




Pipebombs are spectacular in the L4D2 engine.



This is instant death in Realism.



Molotovs provide a few moments' respite.



Cold Stream has scary dark tunnels.



Be glad you can't smell this barbecue.



How to master the infinite caverns

GET STARTED

DIFFICULTY Easy

TIME Five hours

VITAL LINKS:

Official Wiki

bit.ly/terrariawiki

PCG's *Terraria* beginner's guide

bit.ly/pcgterraria

Terrafirma map viewer

bit.ly/terrafirmamod

Terraria mods and tweaks:

bit.ly/modsandtweaks

DUNCAN GEERE'S GUIDE TO CONQUERING TERRARIA

Terraria looks like *Minecraft* remade as a 2D platformer: a blocky world in which you can destroy or place any square of land. It takes the sandbox digging, building and exploring formula and adds lasers, chandeliers, deathworms, acorns, rocket boots and giant floating eyeballs. This is a guide to finding and fighting all that cool stuff. A lot of that, and the equipment you need to get it, is made by crafting. Hit

Escape at any time to see a list of the items you can craft, and click on one to make it. You can then place it into a free slot in your inventory along the top, or drop it into the world.

What you can make depends on the resources you've gathered from mining, exploring and killing monsters, and what you're standing next to. Stand next to a workbench, for example, and you can make more advanced items. So building a

workbench is one of your first priorities. Hit some trees to gather wood, bring up the crafting menu and click the workbench. Put it on the ground next to you, and stand near it any time you want to do some crafting in future. If you're wondering what you can make, present an ingredient to the Guide NPC you'll see wandering around – he'll tell you what other items it can be made into.

As for the rest, let's get to it. 🦇



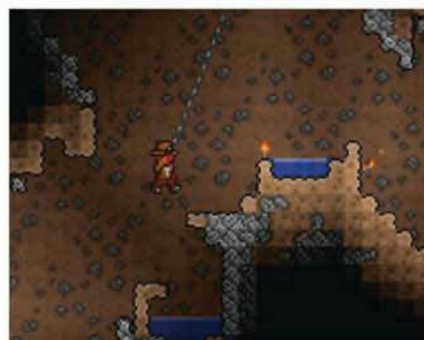
1 Attract some NPCs

First, build yourself a house out of wooden blocks. Then make a table, chair, door, wall and a torch to put in it: all basic recipes you can learn from the Guide. Once you're done, build a few more next to it: NPC characters will move in. There are several, but the first that you're likely to see is the merchant, who arrives after you amass 50 silver coins. You can sell unwanted items to him in exchange for gold, and buy torches, axes and other equipment.



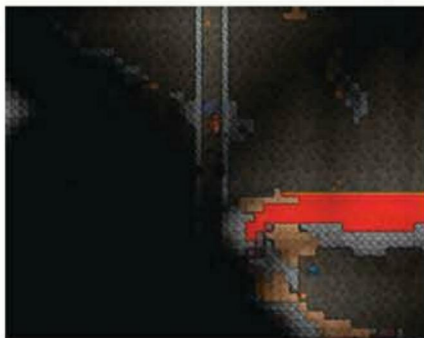
2 Survive a blood moon

There's a one in seven chance each night that a blood moon will occur. You'll know when it does because the sky will turn a deep red and the message "The Blood Moon is rising" will appear. Oh, and your house will be flooded with zombies who can suddenly open doors. To survive, you can place blocks behind doors so that they can't open them, dig a 2x2 trench in front of your door, or go out fighting, to earn bonus money and items.



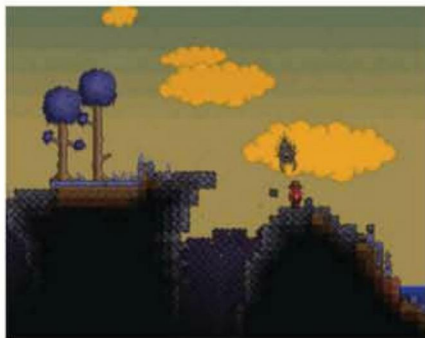
3 Get a grappling hook

Everyone needs a grappling hook. You'll need a furnace and about 42 iron ore, obtained by mining. A furnace just takes 3 torches, 4 wood and 20 stone blocks. You can use that to smelt the ore, then use the iron bars to make three iron chains and an anvil. The only tricky part is getting a hook: they're dropped rarely by the skeletons, dead miners and piranhas you'll find in the cavern layer, where the backdrop walls turn into a darker stone.



4 Create a dropshaft

After you've dug down some way, you'll start getting lost in your own tunnels. The fastest way to descend is to create a sealed dropshaft with a soft landing at the bottom. Mine a shaft two blocks wide straight down, until you reach the desired level. Then place some water or cobwebs to break your fall. To get through air pockets, drop sand below you and tunnel through it. To navigate water or lava, place dirt and mine it out.



5 Find the Corruption

When you're comfortable defeating most monsters and want more of a challenge, head left or right from your spawn point until the sky goes yellow and the grass turns purple. This is the Corruption, and it's full of deep chasms and tougher monsters. At the bottom of most chasms is a shadow orb which, when broken, drops awesome items. However, it also summons meteors and can cause boss creatures to attack.



6 Mine a meteor

Every time you smash a Shadow Orb at the bottom of a corruption chasm, there's a 50 percent chance that a meteor will land somewhere. You'll need a gold pickaxe or better to mine it, but the ore that it yields can create some amazing weaponry and armour. When you find the crash site, be careful of the Meteorite Heads that it spawns, and don't touch the blocks directly because they'll hurt you. Use dynamite for fast, efficient mining.



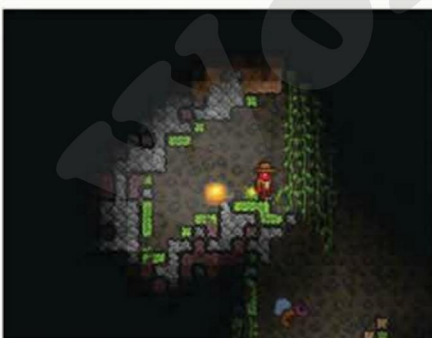
7 Mix a potion

There are dozens of potions you can mix. To do so, you'll need a table and workbench with a bottle placed on top, and a range of ingredients. The full list can be found on the Terraria Wiki, but two useful early potions are the light-creating Shine Potion (made from bottled water, daybloom and a glowing mushroom) and the treasure-finding Spelunker Potion (bottled water, blinkroot, moonglow and gold ore). Show ingredients to the Guide to find more recipes.



9 Beat your first boss

When you've got 200 health, made some silver armour (mine silver ore, smelt it), and attracted at least three NPCs, a message may warn of "an evil presence watching you". This marks the approach of the Eye of Cthulhu. To prepare, build a long flat platform in the sky and buy 200 shuriken and some health potions from the merchant. Once it arrives, hurl shuriken at its pupil while dodging its attacks. Drink health potions and you'll be fine.



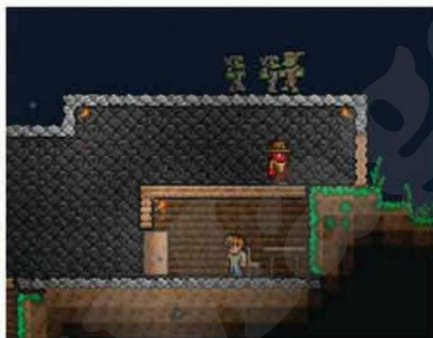
11 Explore the jungle

One of the most dangerous areas of the game is the underground jungle, which is packed with swarms of hornets, bats and piranhas. It's tough to locate, but can be found deep underground in the cavern layer, about two thirds of the way towards one of the edges of the map. The rewards for exploring it, however, are worth the risk – unique weapons, resources and armour are available in the many shrines found in its verdant caverns.



8 Find an island

Floating out of sight, above the top of the screen, are weird islands hovering in the sky. They have valuable ore, items and weapons, but they can be tricky to find. The best approach earlier in the game is to fire a musket into the sky and listen carefully. If you hear the tell-tale sound of vines being cut, that indicates that there's an island above you. Build a column of dirt upwards to reach it, and be sure to take a good look inside the chest you find there.



10 Survive the goblins

Once you've smashed a Shadow Orb and acquired more than 200 health, there's a chance a goblin army will invade. To fight them most efficiently, dig a deep pit outside your house for them to fall into, then use grenades to kill several at once. Alternatively, create wide lava trenches that aren't deep enough to destroy items (test with a copper coin and widen if it disappears) but will still deal damage. Be extra careful of the sorcerers with ranged attacks.



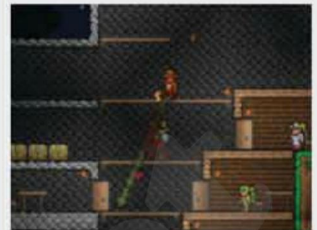
12 Enter the dungeon

On the opposite side of the world to the jungle is the dungeon. An old man guards the entrance, and if you try to enter without talking to him, you'll immediately be slaughtered. Talking to him at night will turn him into Skeletron – a huge skull with arms. It's a tough fight. Once defeated (use your most powerful weapons and plenty of health potions), you can enter the dungeon and find the most rare and impressive weaponry in the game.

SKILLS

DOMINATE IN PVP

HOW TO FIGHT THE GOOD TERRARIA FIGHT AND WIN



1 Make sure you have both a powerful ranged and melee weapon. Bows and arrows can be effective over distance, but guns and boomerangs are easier to hit with. In melee, fast, lower-damage flails are often better than swords.



2 Manoeuvrability is more important than armour. Equip Hermes Boots, Necro Armour or an Anklet of the Wind to flee from more powerful opponents, and a Cloud in a Bottle to cover rough terrain quickly.

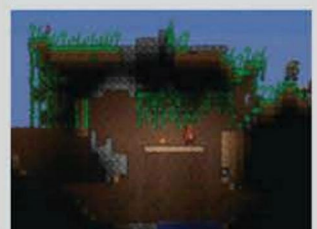


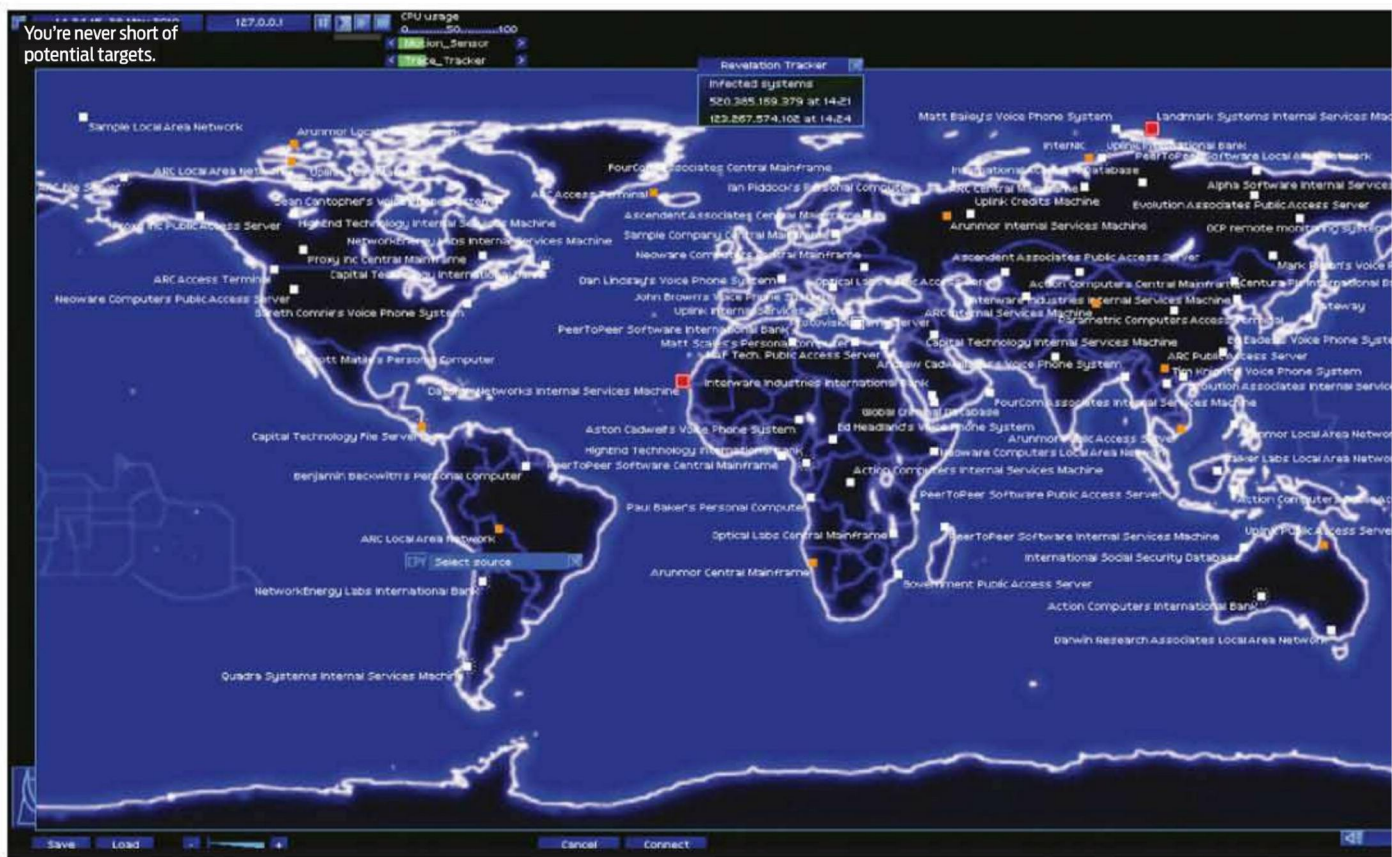
3 Traps can be more effective than weapons. Lava pits do the job, and can be combined with falling sand to take out a powerful character quickly. Use corrupt seeds or meteorite to distract opponents with NPC enemies, too.

BONUS TIP

IN THE MIX

Swiftess and Invisibility potions can be invaluable. Stock up before you enter the match.





“Destroy servers, track down rival hackers, frame innocent people”

PHIL SAVAGE DUSTS OFF HIS DIAL-UP MODEM AND HACKS BACK INTO THE WORLD OF **UPLINK**

It's surprising that hacking isn't the focus of more videogames. It involves computers, the internet and dubious morals – it should be an obvious choice. Yet it's usually relegated to a tacked-on minigame.

Uplink put it front and centre. In the future – 2010 to be exact – you're a freelance hacker using a dial-up modem and a remote eight-gigaquad computer to work for a global organisation dedicated to cybercrime. To

dismiss it as laughable futurism would be to miss the point. *Uplink*'s world is a deliberate mix of the antiquated and the impossible, woven together to evoke the memory of '90s hacker films.

At their core those films were about empowerment. They were stories about a single person able to stand up to and destroy entire – usually evil – corporations. That same idea is at the heart of all *Uplink*'s missions. It starts off small, asking you to break into servers to delete specific files, but soon

ramps up. Once your skill rating is high enough you'll destroy research servers, track down rival hackers and frame innocent people for high-tech crimes. It all builds to a gloriously over-the-top technophobic finale, where the game gives you the power to save or destroy the entire internet. That was probably a harder decision before Rebecca Black.

“The tension is almost unbearable. Disconnect with seconds to spare and you feel like a cybervillain genius”



Focusing on hacking alone, without the graphics to make their game stand out in screenshots, was a risk for Introversion. But that simple, clean interface keeps it feeling fresh, almost ageless, and the lack of an avatar actually creates a sense of immersion. It's *you* manipulating tools to bypass a security system, and this draws you into the world.

Those tools start with a simple trace tracker.

It emits beeps to mark the time left before a security system finds you. It starts out slowly, but as your window of opportunity diminishes it may as well double for a heart-rate monitor. The ramp-up in tension it creates as you race to finish your objective in time is almost unbearable. Disconnect with seconds to spare, and you feel like a cybervillain genius.

This only intensifies as the systems you're asked to infiltrate become more advanced. Before long, you're juggling the agonisingly slow password breaker with firewall bypassers, vocal analysers, proxy disablers and log deleters. For any hope of success, you need to manually assign each app extra processing power as they perform their specific task.

Once you're in, you still have to carry out the objective you were hired for. Many missions require you to type out names to search for records, then manually make the changes needed or write down information for your client. There's so much going on that even a small error can trigger a full-scale panic, sometimes to the point that you have to pull the plug before your work is done.

Saving is automatic, so failure is permanent. If you don't complete an objective and cover



READ ME

FIRST REVIEWED
PCG 107, 80%

PUBLISHER

Introversion Software

DEVELOPER

In-house

REQUIRES

Windows or OS X

LINK

www.introversion.co.uk/uplink

INFLUENCED BY

Hackers, Sneakers, The Net

GET IT FROM

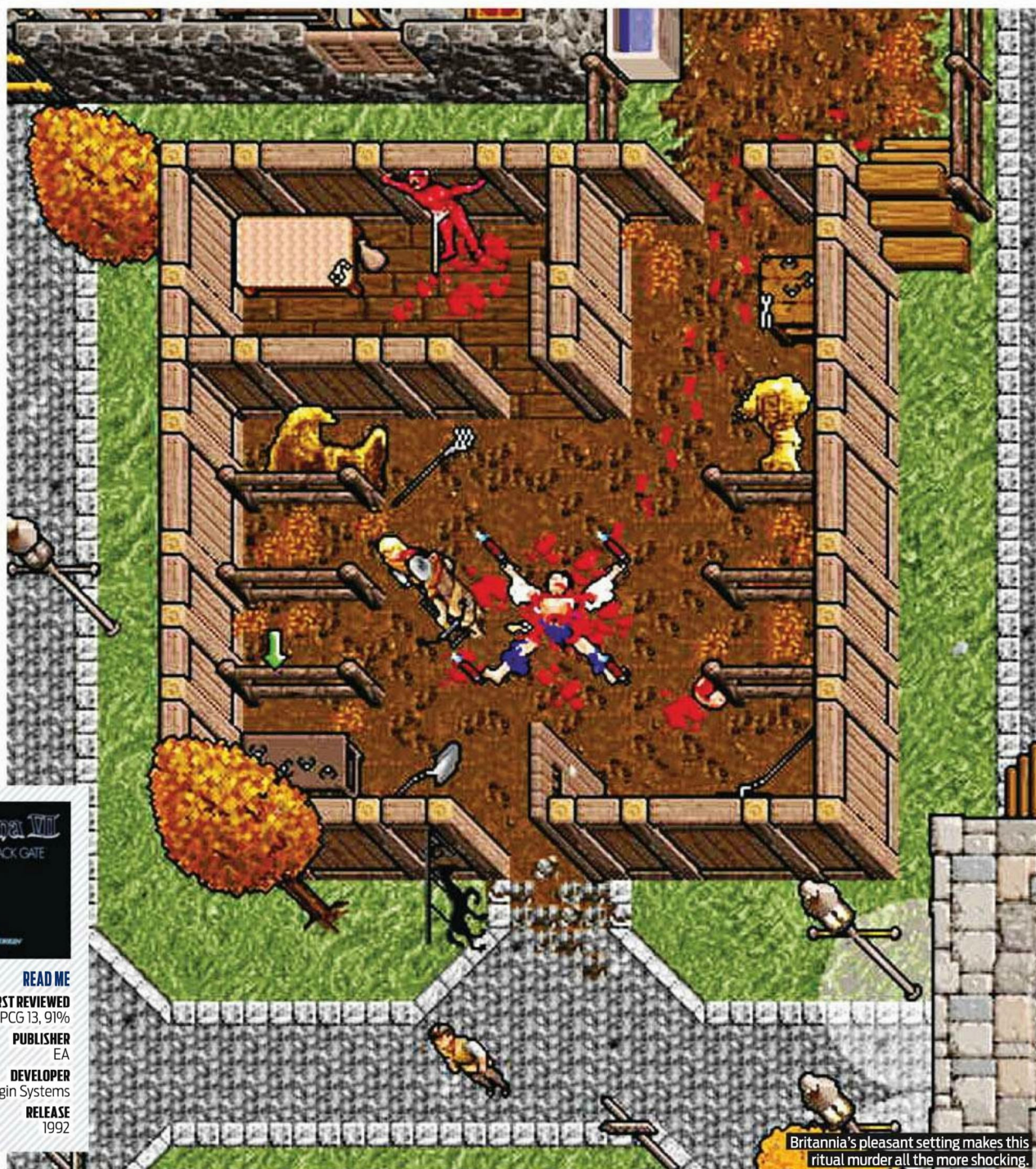
Steam

DECEMBER 2011 **PC GAMER**.com 151

THE MAKING OF...

ULTIMA VII: THE BLACK GATE

HOW RICHARD GARRIOTT TURNED EA INTO AN EVIL EMPIRE, INVENTED THE GAME DESIGNER, AND CREATED ONE OF THE GREATEST RPGS OF ALL TIME *by Mathew Kumar*



Britannia's pleasant setting makes this ritual murder all the more shocking.



READ ME

FIRST REVIEWED
PCG 13, 91%

PUBLISHER
EA

DEVELOPER
Origin Systems

RELEASE
1992

In 1992 Richard 'Lord British' Garriott and his team at Origin Systems released an unmatched entry in the history of PC games. *Ultima VII: The Black Gate* expanded the scope of the RPG beyond what is expected of it even now, creating not merely an open world, but one that was vibrantly alive.

As 'the Avatar', you are thrust into Britannia, a fantasy land where not only are you free to explore at will, but where every NPC lives its own life, going to work in the morning, popping into the pub for a drink in the evening. In the first town you visit, stagestruck citizens are milling around declaiming the lines to a play they're putting on, which is all about your exploits in previous games.

Garriott considers *Ultima VII* to be one of his favourites of the series.

"To give you context," he says, "I split the *Ultima* series up into 'eras'. *Akalabeth*, *Ultimas I-III*, were the period where I was teaching myself to program. *Akalabeth* was written in Basic and pretty clunky. I wrote a better game in Basic, *Ultima I*, but I realized if I could program in assembly I could do even better. *Ultima II* was some pretty clunky assembly, and *Ultima III* was the point where I said 'OK, so now I can program games'."

There was one problem: the games he'd created committed the same lazy cop-out made by RPGs everywhere. In Garriott's words: "You're only the hero because the instructions say you are. In play you pillage and plunder in order to become wealthy and powerful until you go and kill the bad guy who has done nothing during the game except wait for you in the final level... I thought, if you're supposed to be the hero, I want to make sure the player acts as one. *Ultima IV*, *V* and *VI* became stories about how to be virtuous."

What is an Ultima?

Having completed the 'Age of Enlightenment' trilogy in 1990 with *Ultima VI*, Garriott faced the challenge of where to take the series next. He chose to concentrate on Britannia itself.

"With *Ultima VII*, I was really trying to craft the world in which these stories are told. *Ultima I, II, III* weren't even in the same world, and though I created Britannia for *IV*, *V* was barely related to *IV*, and nor was *VI*. With *VII* I started to ask, 'what is an *Ultima*?'"

That, Garriott says, is when he made a crucial design decision: "Whatever assumption the player would have about an object in the world based on the visuals, the interaction would reflect that, rather than having to figure out what we meant. It's the point where I think *Ultima* became complete: with *Ultima VII*."

The first stage was to create the story. This time, it would be a tale of Britannia threatened not by simplistic, obvious evil, but by an insidious cult hiding behind smiles and slippery



words – a more nuanced and ambitious story than that of any previous *Ultima*. But in creating it, the team faced a challenge that still troubles game designers today: how do you tell a linear narrative in an open world?

Garriott's solution: a pair of binders.

"The two binders contain the same data, but threaded in different ways. One of them is the linear story: 'OK, I'm going to start you in Trinsic where you observe this murder, this person is going to have a clue, they're going to send you to this town,' and so on. It's structured as close to a linear story sequence as you can have in a multi-threaded world."

The other binder is organised into Britannia's many towns. "So it's 'here's what happens in Trinsic, here's what happens in Britain,' even if there was more than one visit to a town. I also had what lessons I wanted to be taught geographically, what topic is generally

"We had to provide the wow of 'this is a living, breathing world' while not interfering with the player's progress"

discussed or philosophy that's espoused. It allowed me to load-balance the story and game across the world, spotting opportunities or places that had been under-utilised. I'd work back and forth between the binders until I felt confident enough in my ability to tell the team 'here's the story of our game.'"

With story in hand, Garriott planned the world in which it would be set, intending to weave the narrative into a consistent simulation, one where mission-critical NPCs wouldn't stand around waiting on the Avatar.

"With a plot thread in a town, we didn't want it to be that the Avatar would just meet someone, they'd tell them what he needed to know, and he moved on," Garriott says. "That would have been boring. We had to think about how to make it a bit of a puzzle, a bit of an interesting interaction. We didn't want the NPCs just standing there waiting to be asked; we wanted them to have a real life, maybe a reason they they'd want to talk about the plot,

or a reason that they wouldn't."

To do this, Garriott and his team developed Britannia's 'virtual life' in layers.

"From the foundational story, we created the NPCs, their daily routines, and their interactions with other NPCs. It was a structure that broke down pretty well. By the time we got down to the point where we were ensuring the NPCs would interact with each other, they could be programmed independently, because they'd both have clear indication of what they had to do in the end."

Garriott admits that this challenged the team to ensure that the player wouldn't miss content by simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"In a lot of roleplaying games, if you miss the first clue, you're dead in the water. So we had to make sure that for every quest thread, there were at least two entry points. We were very careful to make sure that every funnel had multiple ways to push you into it."

He adds that there were many "weird things to balance." For example?

"If you go to a town at night, everybody is in bed, and it's actually not that fun to hang out and wait until the person you want to talk to wakes up. We had to be very careful about balancing what the definition of day and night was. I think our nighttime was only like, six or four hours, and you could go into an inn and sleep to bypass it quickly. We had to work really hard to make sure we both provided the wow of 'this is a living, breathing world' while not interfering with the player's ability to make progress at a pace that felt natural."

The road less travelled

Commitment to pacing also influenced the design of Britannia's map. The team wanted to tune the 'game feel' so that travelling across the world conveyed the sense of a real journey, but that brought with it its own complications, as Garriott explains.

"We knew in reality a journey to the next city would take hours, but we didn't want it to take that long because people would get bored. On the other hand if we'd cut like a movie and suddenly you're in the city, that would have felt wrong too. Sometimes we could take a stab at it and be quite wrong. Between *Ultimas IV* and *VIII* we at least a couple of times would lay out the whole world, start running between towns, and think 'man, it is just taking interminably long to get between these.' We had to redraw the whole map and compress everything together."

These kinds of tasks, scripting NPC lives and developing the map, were left to Origin's game designers. Surprisingly, these were considered among the least important staff at the time of *Ultima VII*'s development, as Garriott reveals.

"I believe Origin was the first company to

have something you would call a designer. We didn't even call it a designer at first: we actually called it a technical design assistant, a TDA. TDAs were originally hired to draw the world map, which would take such an enormous amount of time. We originally wanted to hire more artists, as they had the best sense of landscapes, but it was so much busywork that it didn't require the peak demand of their talent, and so we hired some gamers, some QA people, to come across and help flesh out the maps. Then we started to use these TDAs to do some scripting, as the programmers didn't want to encode all of the text for the conversations or the other smaller tasks that didn't require their high-end programming skills. These were very junior members of the team! It wasn't until after *Ultima VII* that the opposite became true."

When talking of *Ultima VII*'s development, Garriott speaks very highly of one member of his team, Warren Spector, who had cut his teeth on such spinoff games as *Worlds of Ultima: Martian Dreams*.

"When Warren was working with me at Origin, really that's when I feel like I did my best work. He's so good about story aspects and I was pretty good at game craft. He was a critical member of the team, and I think that's why *Ultima VII* turned out so well."

Shaping the future

Ultima VII was a controversial game. Its cult bore a passing resemblance to Scientology and had a sideline in grisly murders so graphic that the Avatar's party members might vomit at the sight of them. With Garriott often choosing to comment on contemporary issues with the series, many wondered if the symbols of the cult – a cube, tetrahedron and sphere – were a sly dig at EA, whose logo consisted of the same primitives. Garriott, however, won't hear of it.

"I loved using symbolism in the *Ultima* games, so while for the good side I had symbols for truth, love and courage, for the bad guys I wanted something similar," he says. "Interestingly, I'd chosen the sphere, cube and tetrahedron just because they're primary shapes! But as soon as we became part of EA, I realised what I'd done... and I actually found it pretty hilarious. Though we did get worried that EA wouldn't like it."

He adds, "One of our first discussions with EA was 'do you mind if we make your logo the symbol of the evil empire?' and they were actually OK with it. There wasn't any commentary there."

That's not to say things stayed rosy between Origin and EA. Garriott maintains that one of the reasons that *Ultima VII* is a success compared to its much-derided sequel *Ultima VIII* is that back then they never compromised.

"Even with everything we were putting into

GAMEOGRAPHY

In the early '90s Origin Systems were at the peak of their powers, releasing a succession of groundbreaking games.



Wing Commander (1990)

Chris Roberts' '3D Space Combat Simulator' wasn't just a shooter: it featured cinematic interactive cutscenes and a branching plot in which your wingmen could die and you could even find yourself fighting an unwinnable war.



Ultima Underworld (1992)

The first first-person RPG with full 3D graphics, *Ultima Underworld* offered far more than just a dungeon to hack. It had a plot, trading and monsters you could talk to. Released a year later, *Doom* wouldn't even match the ability to look up and down.



System Shock (1994)

An evolution of the groundwork laid by *Ultima Underworld*, *System Shock* would feature immersive environments, a full-physics-and-lighting system and offer the player the ability to approach game situations as they chose.



BioForge (1995)

Codenamed 'Interactive Movie' during production, *BioForge* is a heavily-plotted, fully voiced, action-adventure with motion-captured animation and a 3D engine that includes the first game characters to be textured with a single skin.



Crusader: No Remorse (1995)

Based on the *Ultima VIII* engine, shooter *Crusader: No Remorse* featured highly-destructible environments, live-action FMV cutscenes, and the controversial ability to kill innocent bystanders.

competent team working on an appropriate initial vision they'll get there as long as you leave them alone until it's done.

"Our problem came with *Ultima VIII*," he continues, "because as the first game we made entirely within EA, we allowed ourselves to buy into the idea that EA had been successful because they released a football game every year. The default belief there was that you have to make a shipping window, that it's a critical thing for your success. Even though it was never the critical thing to our success. But they'd done so well, we believed them and they were our new owners and masters. The result was we cut, cut and cut back on *Ultima VIII*. So much that we didn't finish all these normally completely critical aspects of an *Ultima* and shipped it largely incomplete, and it's my least favourite *Ultima*."

A serpent's tale

Before *Ultima VIII* came *Ultima VII Part Two: Serpent Isle*, a sequel that Garriott explains wasn't developed purely for artistic reasons. Rather, it was a way to "keep the franchise in the public eye" with a spinoff story, while they prepared for *Ultima VIII*. This was something they had previously attempted after *Ultima VI* with the 'Worlds of Ultima' series.

"For *Worlds of Ultima: Savage Empire* and *Martian Dreams*, we decided to take *Ultima VI* and retool it so that we could use the same engine, put in new content and see if we could sell another game. What we discovered with those is that stripping out the content of an *Ultima* and putting in new content is just as hard as making a new *Ultima*. It didn't save any time or money and frankly didn't sell as well.

"So we thought rather than retool our sword and sorcery game completely into a game about dinosaurs, if we just continued the story thread it would be a lot easier. That was where *Ultima VII Part Two* came from. It wasn't part of the original concept of *Ultima VII*... it took almost as much time and money as the original and didn't sell as well either."

Concluding our conversation, I asked what Garriott thought the legacy of *Ultima VII* was, nearly 20 years later.

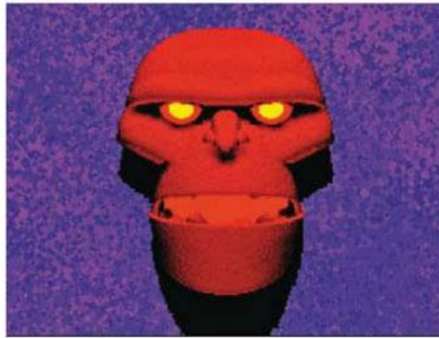
"It's interesting because there have been so few people who have really tried to tackle true roleplaying the way we did, though I am a big admirer of some of the recent works of BioWare. I think if there was a legacy to be had with *Ultima VII*, it would be the hope that as a development community we still have an appreciation and focus on a future where we create games that have a literary depth. There's no question that even *Tetris* is art, but for videogames to be considered literature... that's what I hope *Ultima VII* remains a good marker for: that it represents something that we aspire to do and improve upon in future."

"One of our discussions with Electronic Arts was 'do you mind if we make your logo the symbol of the evil empire?'"

Ultima VII, we never worried it wouldn't come together in the end as long as we had enough time to finish it properly. It's one of the real issues with roleplaying games, you have to make sure they're feature-complete before you release them or you won't get the results you're looking for. I think that if you have a



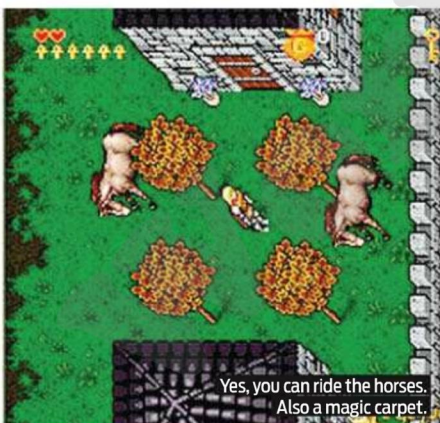
At set times, the locals will file into this church to pray.



At the time, this drag-and-drop interface was revolutionary.



Serpent Isle took the party on a long and not entirely necessary journey.



Yes, you can ride the horses. Also a magic carpet.



Your adventure begins with the discovery of a grisly murder.



Ultima VII's fresh, clean look has aged surprisingly well.

The greatest games on PC



GO TO WAR...

Total War: Shogun 2

totalwar.com/shogun2

Use ninjas and samurai to conquer Japan in a more focused *Total War*, blessed with great AI, sumptuous visuals and clan-based multiplayer.

Also: *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty*, *Dawn of War II*, *Supreme Commander 2*, *Company of Heroes*, *Frozen Synapse*



HAVE AN ADVENTURE...

Deus Ex: Human Revolution

www.deusex.com

It's done the impossible, capturing the spirit of the original cyberpunk RPG FPS, while polishing it for modern tastes.

Also: *KotOR*, *Mass Effect 2*, *Oblivion*, *The Witcher II*, *Fallout 3*, *Assassin's Creed II*, *Dragon Age II*, *Splinter Cell: Conviction*



SHOOT MEN...

Bulletstorm

www.bulletstorm.com

Boot enemies into the air, wrap them in bombs, and launch bullets through their ass-door. It's not about shooting. It's about shooting in style.

Also: *Half-Life 2*, *BioShock 2*, *Crysis*, *Far Cry 2*, *Bad Company 2*, *Just Cause 2*, *L4D2*, *Modern Warfare 2*, *Stalker: Call of Pripyat*



GET SOMETHING FOR NOTHING...

League of Legends

leagueoflegends.com

Pick a hero, join a team and try to not mess up. This action-RPG is one of the toughest games to pick up, but equally hard to put down.

Also: *Dwarf Fortress*, *N*, *GTA 2*, *Freespace 2*, *Tribes 2*, *Anchorhead*, *Nethack*, *TrackMania Nations Forever*, *Spelunky*



LEAD A SECOND LIFE...

World of Warcraft

www.worldofwarcraft.com

With the launch of *Cataclysm*, there's never been a better time to get into *WoW*. It's prettier, funnier, and less grindy. The best just got better.

Also: *EVE Online*, *Warhammer: Age of Reckoning*, *Lord of the Rings Online*, *Guild Wars*, *Mount & Blade: Warband*



PLAY ON YOUR NETBOOK...

Bejeweled 3

bit.ly/ckpPvs

Match gems in rows of three, and in doing so play poker, save butterflies and cause huge explosions in this inventive sequel to the classic puzzle game.

Also: *Monkey Island 2 SE*, *Day of the Tentacle*, *Peggle*, *Bookworm Adventures*, *Uplink*, *World of Goo*, *Braid*



PLAY SOMETHING INDIE

Limbo

limbogame.org

Lonely, haunting and beautiful, this indie platformer is a superbly atmospheric adventure. Brave the forest, save your sister, avoid the spider.

Also: *VVVVVV*, *Revenge of the Titans*, *AudioSurf*, *SpaceChem*, *Super Meat Boy*, *Magicka*, *Misadventures of PB Winterbottom*



FLY, DRIVE AND RIDE...

F1 2011

www.formula1-game.com

The world's most famous race cars have never been so fast, accurate and beautiful. Somewhere, Geoff Crammond is wiping away tears of joy.

Also: *Flight Simulator X*, *TIE Fighter*, *Silent Hunter 4*, *Black Shark*, *Race Driver Grid*, *DIRT3*, *Burnout Paradise*



PWN SOME NOOBS...

Team Fortress 2

www.teamfortress.com

Cartoon styled it may be, but the retribution is real when your 'friend' is stabbing you in the back. Team shooters get no better – and now it's free.

Also: *Counter-Strike Source*, *Unreal Tournament III*, *Battlefield 2*, *Left 4 Dead*, *Battlefield Bad Company 2*

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Edge magazine

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Graeme Boyd, Xbox



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www.lygoworld.com

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www.roxio.co.uk

WHAT? MMO

CRIME DOESN'T PAY

Taking over the world just got a whole lot cheaper...

> Heroes and villains rejoice! Last year's capering *DC Universe Online* has become the latest MMO to switch over to free-to-play (www.dcuonline.com). You can now fight crime alongside the Dark Knight or revel in destruction with the cackling Joker, all without paying a penny.

The new account model comes in three tiers: free players will get access to all current content, but will have restrictions on the amount of items and currency they can carry and trade. Spending \$5, however, will dramatically increase those abilities, with a full subscription available to those who want access to absolutely everything,

without the fuss. So don your spandex and get ready to fight or commit crime online: for truth, justice, and no money down!

DC Online's fellow superhero MMO *Champions Online* has been free for some time, but now it's being joined by its sister game, *Star Trek Online* (<http://bit.ly/freetrek>), which will be free to play before the year is out. Once again a subscription is available, but you can explore nearly all of Cryptic's online galaxy for free, with an already well-stocked store helping support the game through micro-transactions.

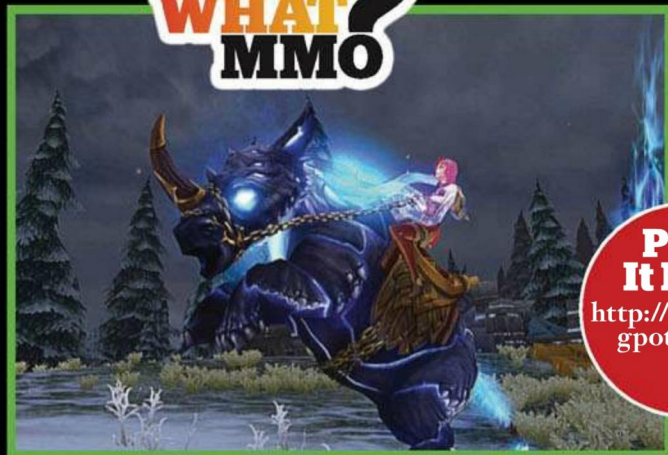
The Borg aren't the only evil robots you could be facing this month – jetpack shooter *Global Agenda* has seen the release of *Recursive Colony* (<http://bit.ly/Recurs>),

a huge, free update that sees players fighting off an army of self-replicating automatons. The update is the biggest in *Global Agenda*'s history and the first since it went free to play, showing that working on *Tribes: Ascend* won't stop Hi-Rez Studios from supporting their first game.

In other expansion news, *Lord of the Rings Online*, which was one of the first wave of MMOs to turn free-to-play in the west, recently launched *Rise of Isengard* (<http://bit.ly/Isenguard>). The latest update gives players the chance to finally explore Saruman's kingdom. Our advice? Make friends with the Ents and stay the hell away from the Uruk-hai. They have terrible manners.



**“You can fight crime with
the Dark Knight or revel in
destruction with the Joker,
all without paying a penny”**



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[http://en.allods.
gpotato.eu/](http://en.allods.gpotato.eu/)



ALLODS ONLINE

The latest update gives *Allods* some soul power

➤ The *Allods Online* October update is coming, and it's full of spooky evil. It seems that Tep, the villainous necromancer whose 'Prison of Souls' appeared back in June, has even more nasty secrets. Players will descend into a new area to investigate his nefarious schemes, and this time souls are not only being imprisoned,

but ghoulishly experimented upon, draining them of their very life force. That sounds pretty cruel, as they've already died once.

Players will venture into this lab of mad ghost science and try and free the poor souls held within. We're told the captive souls will even lend you their strength in order to help them escape, which we can only hope they

do by forming an impromptu group of backing singers and putting on a performance of James Brown's 'Soul Power'.

There's far more than just new narrative in this update, however. The developers have revised and streamlined the first 25 levels of the game to make them more welcoming to new players. The whole levelling experience is now simpler and faster, with the clunky fatigue system now happily removed. Two new classes are also being introduced in this update, so there's never been a better time to roll yourself an alt.

High-level players will also be provided for, with Kingdom of Elements. It's an entirely new zone aimed at hardcore players. Meanwhile the popular Arena of Death PvP area now has a whole new matchmaking system, and will be available 24 hours a day from now on.

Those high-level players who are lucky enough to have their own astral ships will get a further bonus: the ability to customise their boat's interior. Furniture, paintings, rugs and much more are available for you to outfit your mighty vessel as befits a decadent pirate king.

All pirate kings love interior decorating.



FREE TO
PLAY



UNDAUNTED

Download and play for FREE

www.allods.eu

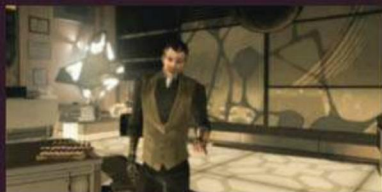


Jensen's blog

26/03/27

Terrorist attack at the office today. Some Russian thug almost got me, but I don't walk round corners blind. Shot him in the head and saved Megan.

Nice of Sarif to check up on me, but he seemed almost disappointed that I was OK.



29/03/27

Nearly slipped on an augmentation pamphlet at the top of the stairs today - I swear someone's leaving them there on purpose.

Sarif still being nice - keeps telling me to "Break an arm!" each time he sends me on a mission. I think he's getting that wrong, but I don't like to say anything.



12/09/27

Sorry I haven't been keeping up with this, it's been a busy six months.

Another attack today, this time at our factoring plant. Easy enough to deal with the Purity First chumps, but the door to the server room was locked and they'd changed the code.

Complete brick wall. I don't know how Sarif expects me to deal with this shit - it's not like I have a hacking suite built into my brain.

In the end I had to walk all the way back up to the roof and ask SWAT to go in. The terrorists gassed the hostages, and Josie Thorpe was shot. What a trainwreck.



13/09/27

Great, now Sarif wants me to break into a police station. I'm not some kind of goddamn super-agent, how does he think I'm gonna get past that many cops? Turn invisible?



15/09/27

Screwed up a mission today. Got to the rooftops in D-Row Ballers territory, but couldn't find a safe way down and they spotted me.

Sarif's letting me go. Already hired some augmented jackass to replace me.

It's funny, though - you know what's really bothering me? I keep losing my fucking sunglasses.

Next month!

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 23

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